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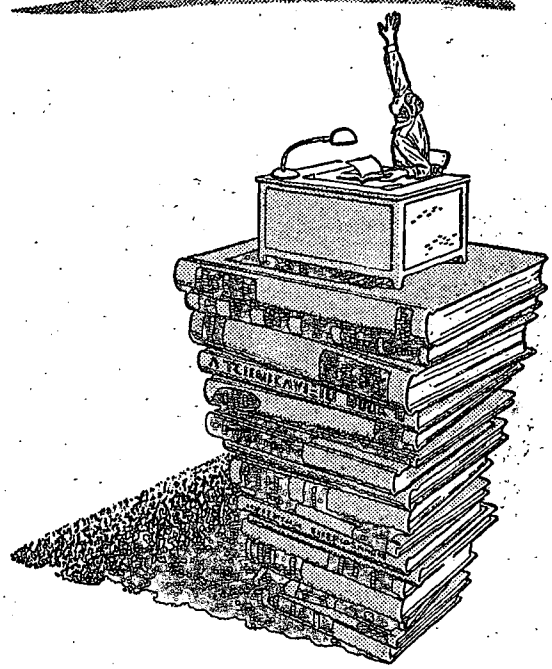

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VOLUME 13 NUMBER 1

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "The Justice of Tor".

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

IT'S A PRETTY well established fact that sequels are never quite as good as the original story. For that reason we always try to avoid running a sequel unless the response from readers is such that we have to accede.

THE LEAD story this issue is such a sequel. Ever since we ran Franklin Bahl's "Face Beyond the Veil" early last year, the fan letters have been coming in steadily, requesting that we ask Mr. Bahl to please do a sequel. At the same time, it seemed that Frank was thinking over the possibilities of furthering the original story. He walked in one day a short time ago and sat down at our desk with a letter in his hand. "Bill," he said, "here's another letter I've gotten asking for a sequel to 'Face'. I think I'd like to try and please the readers if you give me the go-ahead."

WELL, WE'RE not the kind of editors who hold a writer back when he wants to do something. So naturally we said ok. Frank made one other request. "I'd like to add a preface to the story, and include this particular letter, as it seems to sum up what all the other letters have said." We thought that was a nice original touch, where the fans get included right in the lead story of the magazine, so we said ok again.

"THAT'S WHY NOT?!"

YOU'LL FIND Frank's sequel on page 8, and we only mention it here because of the unusual background to its writing. We think the sequel is darn good—but we're not going out on a limb and say it's better than the original yarn. We'll leave that little matter up to you. All we would like to say is that we're here to please you, and we hope you'll find that this is just one more indication that your letters are considered very carefully for the betterment of FA.

SO WHAT else have we been up to recently? For one thing, we've been carrying on a series of correspondence with L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt. Some of you older fans will remember the famous Harold Shea adventures that appeared some years ago in the now defunct "Unknown Worlds". We always liked Harold Shea, and have always felt that he would go well in the pages of your favorite magazine. So we mentioned that to de Camp and Pratt and asked if they thought they could bring Shea back to life in a rip-snorting novel. After many letters back and forth we finally received the first three chapters of the proposed story. We read them with a great deal of interest and returned them to de Camp with a few suggestions. And, of course, our approval on the go-ahead.

WE DON'T have the finished novel in our hands yet, as de Camp and Pratt are taking their time to write a terrific story. But we can guarantee that when we do receive it you'll have a "big" issue of FA in store for your reading pleasure.

THEN TOO, we've been putting the final touches to Bob Krepps' (Geoff St. Reynard) great new fantasy, THE CURSE OF RA. You'll be reading it in the February issue, and take it from us, it's a great yarn. Bob spent several months doing research on the Egyptian background for the story. And we happen to know he works just as hard on his stories for FA as he does for his serious novels which Rinehart brings out. We're mighty proud of our boy, and of course, we know that you are too. Which just about closes up shop for this month. We'll see you on our next on-sale date—December 19th.....wlh

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LUNAR FARMER

★ By H. R. Stanton ★

CONSTRUCTION STATION SEVEN on the edge of Tycho was a beehive of humming activity. Since the plans for Luna City had been decided on, all of the Stations were working at capacity and every man in them was infused with a new sense of power and importance, a sense of responsibility.

All except one, that is.

Engineer Fenton saw the thing happen, but he was powerless to prevent it. He'd been worrying about Luke Crayton for a month—and now it had happened. The gaunt, awkward youth misjudged the swing of the crane and seven tons of air-compressor dropped fifty feet, struck the steel girder, teetered precariously for a moment and then plunged fifty feet into a pile of beams, ending up as a mass of junk!

Engineer Fenton groaned aloud.

"Crayton!" he roared, "come here, you damned fool!"

By the time the gangling boy reached Fenton's office-cubicle and removed his helmet, the engineer had calmed himself somewhat. He gazed at the boy with mingled contempt and sorrow.

Finally he brought himself to speak, the boy avoiding his direct gaze.

"Crayton," Fenton said gently, "I don't know what to do with you. You don't have the slightest feel for tools. You're clumsier than an elephant trying to walk a tight-rope. How the devil did you ever get assigned to a Lunar crew? We're supposed to have skilled mechanics, not bumbling idiots.

Luke Crayton shifted uncomfortably under the supervising engineer's critical stare.

"I ain't no mechanic," he admitted dumbly, "I jest cain't figure them things out. I reckon you better send me back, sir."

Fenton shook his head. "Can't do that. Contract won't allow it and we can't waste any space to the shuttle stations. We should have caught you long ago." He thought for a moment. "Tell you what I'm going to do. I'll put you in hydroponics—know anything about farming?"

"My pappy farmed three hundred acres, sir," the boy said quietly.

"Well, you won't have to do any farming. Granger probably could use another hand at weeding."

So Fenton sent Luke Crayton to Hydroponics, that vast gallery of chemical nutrient tanks filled with growing pumpkin plants which converted carbon dioxide into oxygen to provide the precious air for the work station.

Granger knowing the boy's inability to cope with complicated machinery kept him away from the controllers and only allowed him to weed, to watch and to shovel in the chemicals—previously weighed by himself—into the tanks. He couldn't afford to take a chance.

But apparently he didn't have to worry. Luke Crayton seemed to have struck his element. He fitted in perfectly with the tedious monotonous work. In three months Granger discovered that he could pretty well rely on the boy and he finally gave him minute, implicit instructions, for the starting of a new gallery. Assembling the tanks, starting the seedlings and adding the chemicals shouldn't be beyond the boy. The installation would occupy eight hundred square meters. Then he left Luke Crayton alone. He had enough to do to take care of his present duties.

He first got his chance to inspect Crayton's work about three weeks later.

He walked with the boy to the hydroponics gallery which was supposed to have been set up. The minute he opened the door he knew something was wrong!

Instead of eight hundred acres of growing green leaves, Granger saw a quarter of that area. The rest of the tanks were empty!

His face turned red and he let out a groan. Suffused with rage he turned on Crayton.

"What the hell's the matter with you boy? I promised that this acreage would be ready. We want more oxygen! Can't you understand that?"

Instead of shrinking in fear, Luke Crayton had a smile on his long lean face.

"Naow jest a minute, sir," he said calmly, "I'm givin' you your oxygen. Jest take a look at the recorders."

Apologetically Granger glanced at the instruments. His startled eyes took in the fact that this quarter-acreage was delivering four times what it should have!

"I been doin' a little sperimentin'. sir," Luke Crayton said by way of explanation as the startled Hydroponics chief tried to believe his eyes, "I figgered them plants could stand a little breedin'. My pappy showed me a couple a tricks—an' they worked here jest like back home."

Luke Crayton is now chief of Hydroponics on Luna City. His knowledge of plant life is vast and nobody ever mentions the fact that he can't screw a nut on a bolt without jamming it. He's no mechanic, but he does know plants!

★ ★ ★

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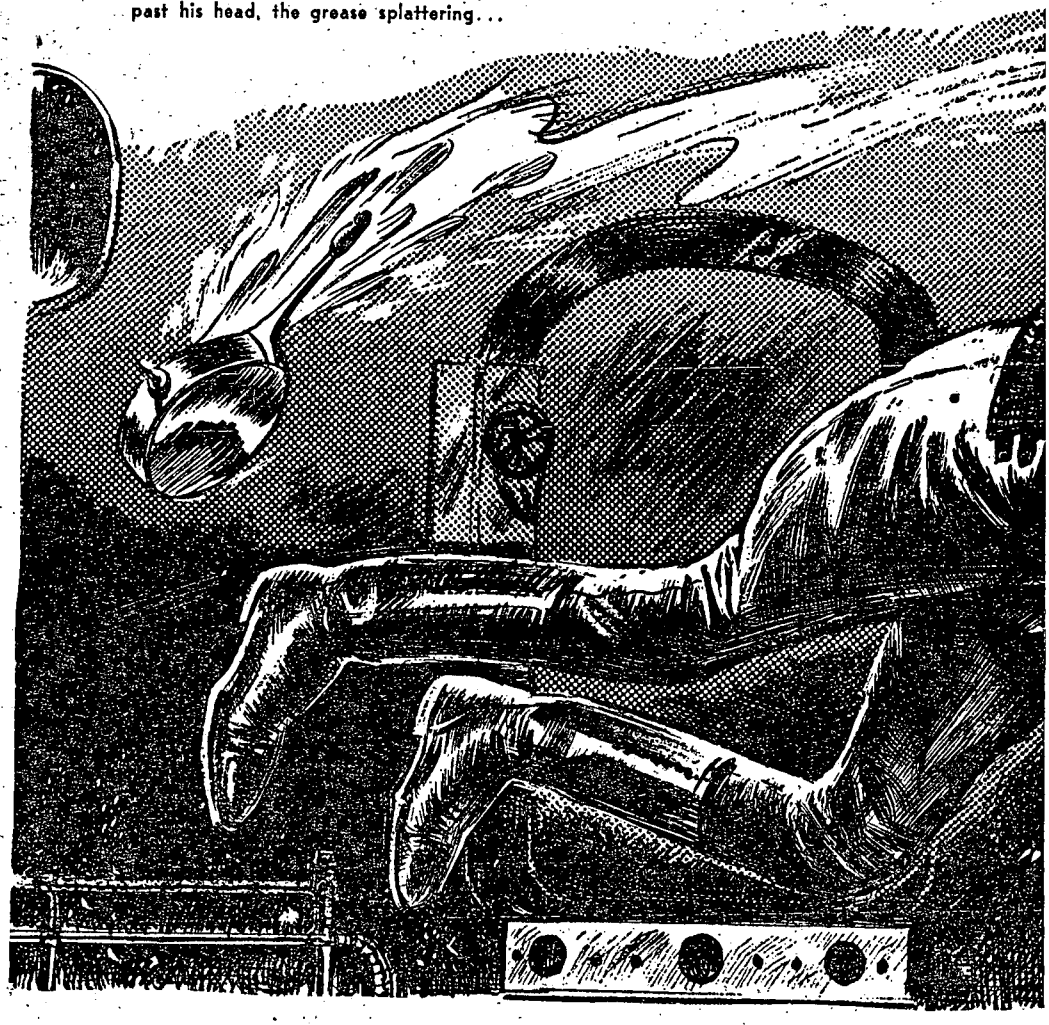
The JUSTICE of TOR

By Franklin Bahl

They came to the asteroid to claim the beautiful Bea-Anna as a prize. But her capture meant that one of them had to die!

He fell forward as the hot skillet flew past his head, the grease splattering...



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

When I wrote "The Face Beyond the Veil" I thought it was a very nice ending to have Bea-Anna turning thumbs down on the men she had encountered in our solar system and go running out into space again. Although some of the readers agreed with me, many of them protested that I just couldn't let her do that without satisfying their curiosity about her.

I didn't see how I could since she had already gone and there just wasn't enough fuel in my jets to go fetch her back. Then came the following note:

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Dear Franklin:

When are you going to supply the sequel to "The Face Beyond the Veil?" You can't leave Dave and Zaney hanging in space like that, you just can't. I want to find out who Bea-Anna is, her origin, the mystery of her enseal-ment and what happens when they release her. It's the most provocative story in late years—a woman able to guide her space-ship yet unable to burst out of her prison. I'll be looking forward to it.

Robert E. Warner
5700 Presley Way
Oakland, California

Well, that did it. The guy that said "Flattery will get you nowhere" belongs to a different political party than I do. I paid up my dues two months in advance in the Asteroid Belt Liars Club so they wouldn't kick me off the roster while I was gone, placed an Occupied card on my favorite easy chair on the upper deck of that old artificial satellite the club bought from the Interplanetary Government for a club house, and blasted off, following the now faint ion trail of the S.P. lifeboat, knowing that the odds were against my ever returning with the story of what happened to Dave and Zaney. But I did and here it is.

—Franklin Bahl

"HOW FAR out are we, Davey?" Zaney Smith asked quietly.

Dave Armet slid his feet off the bunk and stood up. Stretching lazily he went over to the *orienter*. Standard equipment on all spaceships, it was a robot device with tracking photocells permanently fixed on the Sun, Polaris, and Sirius, with an electronic calculator that constantly integrated the elements of the trajectory of the ship, giving its exact location every ten minutes.

"Close to forty-eight billion miles, Zaney," he said. His eyes went to the autopilot panel and widened in surprise. "Looks like we're only two hours from Lark Planetoid. Must have been asleep."

"Thought so," Zaney said. "You been sleeping a long time. Almost twenty-four hours. Something funny in that. Bet that damn woman's got something to do with it."

Dave laughed. "You're always blaming things on Bea-Anna," he said. "Get up off those callouses on your shoulder blades. We can make out details of the surface of the planetoid now and decide what to do."

"That's going to be a problem," Zaney said, sliding spryly out of his bunk. "But if you think Bea-Anna isn't at the bottom of everything that happens you don't know women. Why, its a woman's nature to pry into things and keep the pot boiling. And she isn't any different than the rest, even if she wasn't born on the Earth. I'll bet you the reason she was imprisoned in that fancy spaceship prison was because her husband got tired of her meddling in his affairs all the time."

"Husband?" Dave exclaimed, startled at the thought.

Zaney chortled. "Never occurred to you she might be married," he said. "First thing I thought of. I thought, 'By gollies, why didn't I think of that myself. I could have stayed on Earth instead of running off to be a space prospector.' "

"So that's your secret!" Dave said. "You're an alimony refugee."

"What if I am," Zaney grumbled. "Not that I'm admitting it," he added hastily. He rubbed his whiskers thoughtfully, started to say something,

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then clamped his mouth closed.

Dave turned to the visual telescope. Zaney stared at his back uncomfortably.

"Look at the way she's done, Davey," he said. "As near as we can figure she was travelling through space, for God knows how many millions of years. She reached the Solar System. Instead of contacting one of the planet governments she took an orbit and waited until she could contact somebody by telepathy. Then what? Instead of contacting just one person she contacted me, you and your partner Bill, and Rek Barker and his gang of cutthroats. Why? To make trouble."

"Her telepathic call went in every direction," Dave said without taking his eyes from the telescope. "It would only go so far before it became too weak for anyone to catch it. She stopped when you got there."

"Maybe!" Zaney snorted. "Anyway, the fun started. Rek got me and tortured her orbit data out of me, then towed her ship to his hideout in Lark Planetoid. Red had her at his mercy until you showed up. You turned the tables and went for help. And what did she do? She picked up her skirts and ran. Played you for a sucker."

"She must have had her reasons," Dave said, unperturbed. "Take a look, Zaney. See if you can make out that hole in the surface where we took off from when we left. It would be much smarter to go back through that pipestem fault to the hollow center of the planetoid than to go in through the big opening on the other side past all the big guns. We'd be blasted for sure, since this is a Space Patrol life ship with the S.P. emblem on it."

"And that damn woman'd let them," Zaney muttered as he took Dave's place at the telescope.

A moment later he motioned to Dave with his arm. Dave looked and saw the dark spot. He glanced up at Zaney with a tight grin. Then he adjusted the telescope so that its cross hairs were on the dark spot, flicked in the tracker calculator and guided the telescope manually until the calculator had *fixed* it, then pressed the button that hooked in the robot pilot and the robot navigator units. They took over and began the task of landing the ship in that hole without a jar.

They strapped themselves into their bunks. Dave closed his eyes and tried to make contact with Bea-Anna. He sent out the thought that they were landing. He sent it out repeatedly, trying to sense whether she were aware of his thought or not.

There was not the slightest sign of response. There had been no thought from her since that brief telepathic contact she had made to give her position and trajectory. Was she dead? Dave shook his head at the thought. Surely if she had died, she would have at least flashed him some message before death. No, he decided. She must be waiting for him to arrive before contacting him again.

"THAT WAS the smoothest landing I've ever experienced," Dave said. "These S.P. ships are really built!"

He and Zaney unstrapped themselves and got out of their bunks. Zaney went to the spacesuit locker.

"Well looky these!" he said delightedly.

He took one of the suits out. It was an iridescent yellow with bold red letters on chest and back. In outer space where ultraviolets are strong it would glow like fire.

"Not too good for our purpose," Dave said. "They're painted so a man can be seen." His eyes lit up at a sudden thought. "Maybe they will be after all. The pirates may think two

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S.P. spacesuits mean there are more coming."

They slipped into the suits.

"Think there might be a reception committee outside the ship?" Zaney asked, pausing before entering the air-lock.

"Not a chance," Dave said. "The rocket gases would have taken care of that if there were anyone."

Nevertheless both men made sure their g.i. automatics were free in their holsters for instant action.

They stepped into the airlock. Zaney pressed the red button that started the automatic action of closing the inner door, pumping most of the air into the storage tanks, and opening the outer door.

The rock wall of the pocket in Lark Planetoid they were in loomed in the black gloom, faintly sketched in white splotches where the hoar frost of frozen gases was already recongealing after being evaporated by the heat of the rockets.

Dave and Zaney searched the gloom for signs of movement. Then they jumped lightly, drifting slowly downward to the stone floor.

They quickly found the entrance to the pipestem leading downward in an erratic course, to come out under the hull of Rek Barker's headquarters ship moored to the inner surface of the planetoid.

Two hours later they emerged from the opening there.

"Rek's ship's gone!" Zaney exclaimed.

"Maybe the rest of the gang took it and escaped as soon as they learned we had escaped and taken Rek with us," Dave said. "So much the better. Now we won't have any trouble from that source."

"What about all the captives they had?" Zaney said. "They wouldn't bother to take them with them."

Dave looked out over the immense interior of the planetoid that was vaguely illuminated by the starlight entering through the two mile wide hole on the far side. Ships were moored here and there, forming huge clusters. Each of those ships, stolen by Rek Barker and his men over the years and brought here to be pillaged at leisure, was worth several million dollars.

If Lark Planetoid could ever be returned to the Solar System so those ships could be turned over to the authorities the salvage value would run into the billions!

But he wasn't interested in that. His eyes kept searching until they found the dull sphere that was Bea-Anna's ship. He felt his pulse quicken. She was still here!

"Bea-Anna!" he called in his thoughts. There was no answer.

He blanked his mind, listening for thoughts.

"Damn woman. We'll probably die in this blown egg of an asteroid."

It was Zaney Smith. There was no other tendril of thought. Dave looked out across the void at the round disc of unevenly bright light that was the heavens revealed through the two mile wide hole to the outside of Lark Planetoid. He stared at it for a long minute, then let his eyes roam through the gloom of the hollow interior with its topography of rough shadows. The realization pressed in about him that he and Zaney were alone.

There was no one here except Bea-Anna and themselves. The others were gone.

And the planetoid was hurtling away from the Solar System at a speed of over two thousand miles a second, already well beyond the orbit of Pluto.

"Bea-Anna!" Dave said sharply, aloud.

Zaney heard it through his suit

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radio. He regarded Dave gravely, reading in his expression the fact that they were alone here, the others gone.

"I didn't expect anything else, Davey," he said. "I expected Nels Bronson would take the rest of the gang and lam out of here the minute he discovered we had escaped. And the minute the pirates left, the others would get together and light out in one of the other ships. But it didn't make any difference anyway. You wanted to come after your lady love. Hell, this is as good a place to spend the rest of your life as any, isn't it?"

"Sure, Zaney," Dave said.

The two men grinned slowly at each other through their glassite helmets. On impulse they reached out and shook hands.

"STOP MAKING so damn much noise with those dishes!" Dave said.

Zaney paused in his setting of the table and blinked sympathetically at him. "Sure, Davey," he said placatingly.

"And stop calling me Davey," Dave said. "You may be an old man, but I'm not a child."

"All right, Dave," Zaney said. "You going over to Bea-Anna's ship again today?"

Dave sat down and cupped his face in his hands without answering.

"Why don't you find something to do Dave?" Zaney said. "You've got to start adjusting pretty soon. You're going to pieces."

"Who cares?" Dave muttered.

"Meaning Bea-Anna?" Zaney said. He carefully concealed his pity. "Maybe she doesn't know you're here," he suggested.

"Of course she knows I'm here!" Dave said.

"I've been wondering about it," Zaney went on. "There's no question but what she's at least thousands of years old. How does she occupy her mind? What does she do? We saw her immersed in that bowl up to her neck. She said it was a chemical bath that kept her immortal."

"Go on," Dave said, interested.

"Well," Zaney said, "if I was her on these long jaunts of thousands of years between solar systems I'd go to sleep and set the alarm to go off in the presence of gravity."

"But she wouldn't do that and let me die of old age here while she sleeps!" Dave protested.

"Wouldn't she?" Zaney said. "Then why did she run away from you? The minute the others had lammed and she was alone she started away from the Solar System, taking Lark Planetoid and everything in it with her, because her ship anchored too strongly to the rock to break free."

"But she told me her trajectory," Dave argued. "Unless she wanted me to come she wouldn't have done that."

"Maybe it was a slip," Zaney said. "You just got that. Nothing more." When Dave didn't say anything he added, "Maybe she was so sleepy then she couldn't stay awake until you arrived."

"You might be right, Zaney," Dave sighed. "Three weeks and not a whisper of thought from her. But I've got to keep trying. The only alternative is to give up and just—just—" He ended on an ineffectual tone. Anything else was unimaginable.

"We've got every device known to man here in Lark Planetoid," Zaney said. "You could start experimenting on something. Become a scientist. You could set up instruments to gather data about outer space between the stars. Speed of light, spectroscopic studies, a million other things. Maybe in time you could discover for yourself how to cut into that neutron matter. After all, it's only atoms like any other stuff."

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"Not the same," Dave corrected. "Its orbital electrons are collapsed onto the nucleus. The atoms are thousands of times closer together than ordinary matter."

"But they're still atoms," Zaney said. "I'll bet if we set up a cyclotron it could eat a hole through that wall in a few weeks."

"So you used to be a scientist!" Dave said softly.

"I didn't say it," Zaney said.

"No," Dave smiled, "but you thought it."

"You're snooping into my mind—" Zaney began irritably. He shrugged his shoulders. "Guess you can't help it," he muttered.

"Why don't you tell me about yourself," Dave said. "We're stuck here in Lark Planetoid for the rest of our lives. I'm beginning to suspect depths to you I'd like to get acquainted with, Zaney."

"Depths?" Zaney sneered. "I was just a young and innocent physicist who happened to fall in love with the wrong girl. When she got ready to she framed me and got a divorce with alimony enough to keep me broke forever. So I skipped and became a space prospector. Nothing to it. That story was old before the first rocket hit the Moon." He glared at Dave. "Sit down and eat your breakfast," he growled.

"WELL?" ZANEY said.

Dave shook his head. "Not there," he said. "Looks like Rek Barker and his gang managed to sell most of the cargo of the *Ranger V* too. Too bad Uranium and Gold aren't magnetic. There's enough of those two metals to build a dozen cyclotron magnets."

"The cyclotron is out then," Zaney said. "That's the last ship. There's not enough laminated transformer iron in the whole shootin' match, even if we tore down every motor and generator. That leaves the electrostatic devices—but wait! We've forgotten one of the ships."

"Mmmm," Dave said. "I've checked the cargos of every one."

"Not the Astrazomb," Zaney said.

Dave stared at him blankly a full minute.

"Come on," he exploded. "Funny I never thought of looking in Bea-Anna's ship."

"I'll bet you've never even explored it," Zaney said. "Me, I've wanted to, but it was sort of your territory. Now's my opportunity."

He slipped on his spacesuit and followed Dave out of the airlock of the *Martian Queen*, the huge luxury liner they had chosen as headquarters. An hour later they landed expertly in the open airlock of the globular ship.

"We'd better explore together," Zaney said. "Two pairs of eyes are better than one in looking at strange things, and I'll bet there's plenty of strange things aboard this ship."

The inner door opened as the airlock pressure became equal with that inside.

"Which way?" Zaney asked, slipping out of his spacesuit.

"To the left," Dave grunted. "I've never been far that way. The wall in front of Bea-Anna is all I've been interested in up to now."

They switched on lights as they went forward, lights that Rek Barker had had strung along the ceiling when his men had cleaned the dust of countless ages out of the entire ship with huge vacuum cleaners.

Here and there were unbolted pieces of what had once been machines before their insulation; paint, and every other aging substance had crumbled to dust.

"I guess Barker was planning on turning some of this stuff over to scientists to see what it was," Dave

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said after a half hour of silent exploration. "Take a look at that beautiful coil over there."

He stooped in front of it and studied it while Zaney stood behind him.

"An air core transformer, looks like," Dave muttered.

"No," Zaney said. "I guess we don't need to look for transformer iron any more. That had an iron core. It oxidized and turned to dust."

"An iron core big enough to fill that hole?" Dave said. "Why, that would take millions of years with a supply of air around it, and the air must have leaked out very shortly. In a thousand years at least."

"It makes me wonder," Zaney said slowly. "How does it happen that the things in Bea-Anna's prison haven't deteriorated? There must be electric wires covered with insulation, and lots of other things that aren't all noncorroding substances. There must be transformer cores in there, too."

"Don't go getting the cart before the horse, Zaney," Dave said. "We can't get in there until we find transformer iron out here."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Zaney said absently. "I was wondering why everything outside her prison on this ship was built to deteriorate, while everything inside it had to be built to last forever." He reached up to rub his whiskers. His hand paused as his eyes lit up. "That's another thing," he said. "Bea-Anna wanted you to go to Mars or Earth to get the devices necessary to break through the wall into her prison. She knew they couldn't be found here."

"Then we're licked," Dave said.

"Maybe," Zaney said thoughtfully. "You go to your post at the wall. I want to just wander around the ship. Maybe I'll get an idea. At least it'll kill time. Some of this stuff is interesting."

"I'VE BEEN around people too much lately," Zaney muttered. "Damn Davey for waking up the past. Of course, he's young. He doesn't know that memories a man's spent years forgetting shouldn't be touched on."

He wandered further through the halls and rooms of the Astrazomb that surrounded the huge cylinder of neutron matter that formed Bea-Anna's prison. Most of the rooms contained nothing at all. Others contained metal furniture. Stainless steel, monel metal, and other alloys.

"Now I wonder why there would be desks and furniture here unless there were people out here at one time," he muttered. "I'll bet that's it. There were people out here in the beginning. They all died off. Their bones turned to dust and were sucked out with the rest of the dust when those vacuum cleaners went to work in here."

He continued to stare at the desk. There were drawers. He bent down and pulled one open. It had the same action as drawers in cabinets on regular space ships, having to be lifted a quarter of an inch before being pulled out. It was empty. The others were empty too.

"I wonder why these people went along with Bea-Anna?" Zaney said, talking to himself. "If they couldn't control the flight of the ship through space or get in to Bea-Anna why would they be needed? To give her some company? To stand in front of that wall so she could look at them? To just be around so she could read their minds like Davey does mine and not be lonely?"

He continued his explorations until he entered a corridor at the other end of which he could see Dave squatted on the floor with his back to a

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bulkhead, his eyes fixed on something out of sight.

"I've gone clean around the ship," he muttered. "Think I'll try some other level. Maybe I can get an overall picture of the layout of the ship, if nothing else."

He turned back to the last open tube vertical with the floor. Gradually as he continued, intent now only on learning the general details of layout of the ship, he built up a picture.

There were cylindrical tubes sticking out from the prison capsule and bringing up against the inner surface of the outer shell. These tubes were of neutron matter joined solidly to the capsule itself.

"Probably the drive tubes carrying the forces that propel the ship," he said aloud. "This outer part I'm in is just a sort of excess baggage, in a way, tacked on for those original travelers that went along with her."

Finally he had finished his exploration.

"Not a dang thing in the whole ship," he said. "Not even an engraving or trade mark stamped in metal to give an idea of the kind of letters they had in their alphabet. Not a statue. It's almost like they didn't want to leave the slightest trace out here. I'm even beginning to have doubts that a cyclotron could touch that neutron matter."

HE RETURNED to the airlock. Dave's spacesuit was still there so he went down the corridor to where Dave was. Dave looked up.

"Find anything?" he asked.

"Not a thing," Zaney said. "And I suppose Bea-Anna didn't pay any attention to you today either."

"No," Dave said. "I wish I knew why. If I only knew why I'd feel better about it."

"Why don't you get your mind off her?" Zaney said. "Get interested in something. You don't have to sit here every day. When she gets around to talking to you she can do so just as easily if you aren't right here." He grinned slyly, adding, "If I know women that'd make her come around quick enough, if you started losing interest and began to ignore her."

Dave shook his head, utter misery appearing on his face.

"This isn't something to play around with," he said. "I don't think you know what real love is."

"Maybe Bea-Anna doesn't either," Zaney said.

"This is something beyond ordinary experience," Dave went on. "She reached down into the very roots of my mind and changed things around. I've been doing a lot of thinking while I sit here day after day. I'm not like other people any more. I know you don't like it because I can read your thoughts. How do you think another girl would feel about that? Only someone like Bea-Anna, to whom mind reading is also something normal, wouldn't resent it."

"Well," Zaney said, "evidently she can cut you off from her thoughts. I don't know how to do that. Wish I could. But dang it, I wish you'd stop mooning over her. For all you know she's decided she doesn't want anything to do with you, and is just waiting for you to die of old age so she can be rid of you. A woman'd do a thing like that if she wanted to and think it was O.K.. And a woman a million or so years old, with millions of years ahead of her, would think nothing of forty or fifty years, the time it would take you to die of old age. After all, she let these other people that started out with her die."

"What other people?" Dave asked.

"The ones that used the furniture in this outer part of the ship," Zaney said. "It's a big place. I've been all

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over it now. There must have been hundreds, maybe thousands of people here at one time. What became of them? They died off, that's what. And Bea-Anna didn't lift a finger. Maybe she ignored them like she does you."

"I don't believe that," Dave said slowly, his eyes going to the opaque wall behind which Bea-Anna rested, unseen and silent.

"I'M GOING to need your help, Davey," Zaney said at breakfast three weeks later.

"You've got a plan for breaking down that wall?" Dave asked eagerly.

"I'm not sure it'll work," Zaney said. "I'm going to build a linear proton accelerator."

"Where'll you get the protons?" Dave asked.

"From Hydrogen," Zaney said. "We'll get the Hydrogen from water. The proton generator will be a simple enough thing. Just an ionization device with fields that pull the protons out in one direction and the electrons in another. The protons will go into the accelerator. They'll come out of it at speeds around a hundred thousand miles a second and crash into that neutron matter. Some of them should hit atoms of that stuff just right and break it up."

"You mean atomic disintegration?" Dave asked.

"Yeah," Zaney said.

"What'll happen then?" Dave asked.

Zaney frowned. "I don't know," he said. "Neutron matter should be a sucker for bombardment. But whether the nuclear binding forces would hold it together or not I don't know. No way of finding out except to try it."

"But what if a chain reaction starts up?" Dave said.

"If that happens Lark Planetoid will just be a Nova in the heavens for a second or two if anybody on Earth or Mars happens to be looking," Zaney shrugged.

"Then we can't do it!" Dave said. "I won't stand for anything that might risk Bea-Anna's life."

"If she don't like it let her say something then," Zaney said. "She probably knows what'll happen. If she doesn't say anything I'll know it will either work or not do anything. She wouldn't remain silent while I do something that would destroy her."

"She may be asleep," Dave said. "I won't run the risk. You're not going to do it."

"Yes I am," Zaney said quietly.

"No you're not," Dave said. "And don't try anything. I can read your plans in your mind before you try anything. If you don't behave I'll have to lock you up."

"What's come over you, Davey?" Zaney said. "A month ago you saw no objection to bombarding that shell with protons. It's the only way. Ordinary mater is like a rarefied gas to cut through. It would be like trying to saw a board by blowing on it. Ordinary matter is like a rarified gas to heavy matter. What do you want to do? Just go sit in front of that wall every day for the rest of your life?"

"I don't know what I want to do," Dave said, torn by emotion. "All I know is that I don't want to do anything that might endanger Bea-Anna's life."

"Well she certainly has done plenty to endanger our lives," Zaney said. "Damn women. More I see of them the more I hate them."

"That's it," Dave said, laying down his fork. "I should have seen it before. You hate her. You know what will happen. You'll start a chain reaction. You used to be a scientist. You know what will happen. You'll kill her to get even with all the things you've imagined women have done against you."

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"You're getting a little space-wacky," Zaney said. "Snap out of it. Sitting in front of that blank wall everyday is unhealthy."

"So now you accuse me of going crazy," Dave said. "Did it ever occur to you that that's the first sign of insanity, accusing others of being crazy?"

"Calm down, Davey," Zaney soothed. "We're both a little off our course."

"I'm sorry, Zaney," Dave said abruptly. "I'm going to have to lock you up. I can't trust you any more."

"Why not let me just take all the fuel I can load into that S.P. lifeboat and try to make it back to the Solar System?" Zaney said. "Then I'll be out of your hair permanently."

"No," Dave said, shaking his head. "I can read your thoughts, remember. You'd try to turn the tables on me. You're convinced I'm crazy, and should be locked up. I can't trust you."

He was coming around the table toward Zaney, slowly, his fingers working.

Zaney suddenly leaped up, lashing out with his fist; but Dave had moved at the same instant, easily avoiding the fist.

"You forget I can read your mind and know what you're going to do before you do it," he said grimly. "You're an old man. I don't want to have to hurt you. Just give up peacefully so I can lock you up. I'll take care of you. You don't have to be afraid."

"You may be able to read my mind, Davey," Zaney said, "but you're soft. I'm going to wear you down. When you get tired it won't do you any good to read minds."

He picked up a plate and threw it at Dave's head. Dave ducked even as he threw it. As it left his hand he picked up another and threw it.

"All right, Zaney," Dave said grimly, "You're asking for it. You won't give in so I'll have to hurt you."

He doubled his fists. Zaney darted to the electric range and picked up a skillet and threw it, hot grease spattering in the air.

Some of the hot grease splashed on Dave's neck. He wiped at it with his hand. Instantly Zaney stepped in and brought his fist against Dave's jaw with everything he had. Dave's eyes glazed over for a second. He staggered back.

Zaney followed him, fist ready for a clean opening. It came. His fist landed. Dave flew backward, his head coming up againsnt the bulkhead sickeningly. He dropped to the floor unconscious.

Breathing hard, Zaney dragged him from the kitchen along a corridor to one of the staterooms. He dumped him inside, took the key out of the door and locked the door on the outside.

He stood there looking at the cream panel of the door, breathing hard, a look of suffering in his eyes.

"Sorry, Davey," he said. "So damn sorry. But somewhere in your mind you know I had to do it."

"DAMN WOMAN," Zaney said cheerfully.

He stepped back to view the almost finished cloud chamber admiringly.

"Nice bit of brazing, Zaney," he complimented himself.

He shut off the torch and hung it over the acetylene tank, then went over to the lathe that was turning out a brass pipe elbow from a template, the movements of the cutting tool and the gleaming piece of metal changing dizzily.

"Of course, in a way, she's all right," he said conversationally to himself. "I can't blame her for being leery of Dave. A nice guy, but he cracks up. If she went into the depths

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of his mind maybe she knew he would. The more I think of it the more I think his getting her trajectory back there on the Space Patrol flagship was a fluke. A slip on her part."

The cutting tool was running free now. He stopped the lathe and took the finished elbow out of the clamps.

"Nice job," he said to the lathe. "Feel in the mood to do another? O.K. . ."

He went to the pile of material he had laid out and got another brass blank to clamp in the lathe stock.

"Do as nicely on this and I'll let you rest a while," he said, patting the lathe affectionately.

He took the finished elbow over to the cloud chamber assembly, put it in place, and lit the brazing torch again.

"I could maybe fuel up that life boat and leave you in peace, Bea-Anna," he said, pulling his goggles down off his forehead, "but I've gotten so interested in making this proton accelerator that I'm going to finish it before I make up my mind about anything. Maybe by then Davey will have gotten interested in those books I put in his room. Right now all he's concerned about is my going ahead with what he thinks is revenge on you." He chuckled knowingly. "Oh you can't kid me. You're a woman. I know you've got your mental ears glued on every word I say or think. You wouldn't miss anything for the world. So I'll just go ahead talking to myself knowing you're listening. Me, I'm different than Davey. I've learned how to get along with myself. I spent too many years prospecting all alone not to learn how or go mad. And I guess if I was inclined to go crazy I would have done so when my wife played me for a sucker."

He bent over and heated a spot where the elbow and a pipe fitted together.

"Maybe when I get this job done I'll make something else," he said. "Actually I couldn't pick a better set-up to spend my life puttering around in. I might even try some of those experiments I used to dream of doing when I had the time and money to build my own research laboratory."

He frowned in concentration as he started to deftly manipulate the flowing bronze around the joint, flowing it into the crack to make a neat, gas tight joint.

"I s'pose you know the answers to all the problems of science, Bea-Anna," he went on. "You probably smile at the experiments I want to try. I'm probably just a little bug running around in its own stupidity to you. But I'll bet you wore diapers yourself once. That's one thing about life. We all started out even at the beginning. Or don't you want to think about that?"

He chuckled.

Humming softly to himself he chased the puddle of molten metal around the joint and smoothed it off. Shutting off the torch he surveyed his handiwork.

"Bet you couldn't have done a bit better, Bea-Anna," he said. "Or do you just run to brains?"

He chuckled to himself again and went to the lathe.

"You're doing all right, sonny," he said, patting it. "You and I understand each other. No wild ideas or standoffishness. Machines are the nicest people to associate with."

He chuckled again and glanced at his watch.

"Time to fix Davey some lunch," he said.

"YEP, SKILLET," Zaney said, "in all my sixty-two years I've never seen a better skillet than you."

He swished the scrambled eggs around with a deft movement and slid them into the plate on the tray.

"Yep," he said, "a real aristocrat

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among skillets for an aristocrat among spaceships."

He set the pan down on the electric range. Picking up the tray he balanced it expertly on the palm of his left hand, pushing open the door to the corridor.

"Soup's on, Davey," he called cheerfully, his voice echoing along the corridor. "Nice and hot."

He began whistling on an off key as he scuffed along, balancing the tray over his head.

He came to the door. His whistling stopped in the middle of a note.

The door panel had been torn out, and was hanging by one corner. It was rocking idly in the slight breeze produced by the ventilation system.

Pasted to the wall with scotch tape beside the doorframe was a sheet of paper with writing on it. Zaney slowly lowered the tray and held it with both hands while he approached the piece of paper to read it.

"Zaney," it read, "I'll give you forty-eight hours to fuel up the S.P. lifeboat and blast off from Lark Planetoid. If you aren't gone by then I'll kill you. And I can always read your mind and know where you are, while you can never know where I will be." It wasn't signed.

His shoulders sagged. He licked his lips nervously.

"I guess you mean it, Davey," he said sadly. "Can't say that I blame you. Don't know what got into me to lock you up. I should have been able to think of a better way to handle the situation than that." He lifted his head and looked at the note on the wall again. His shoulders squared. "But I ain't going. You can kill me if you want to, but I'm not going to leave. We started out together and I'm sticking to the end. So if you're going to kill me don't wait forty-eight hours. Do it right away."

He set the tray on the floor directly under the note, then shuffled down the corridor to prepare his own meal. He had taken no more than twenty steps when there was a deafening report that exploded an instant after a shrill whine. A small puncture appeared in the insulation along the wall ten feet ahead, with a lazy puff of white powder rising out of it.

"That's a warning that I mean what I say!" he heard Dave shout from some distance behind him.

He stopped and turned slowly. Dave's head and shoulders were thrust through the broken panel of the door.

"I kind of thought you were in there, Davey," Zaney said mildly. "I'm not going to change my mind. Shoot me now if you want to. Get it over with."

"Forty-eight hours, Zaney," Dave said grimly. "No more no less."

"I'll be ready to meet my Maker, Davey," Zaney said.

He turned his back and continued on toward the kitchen. The clatter of a dish followed by a muttered curse brought a half smile to his lips under his beard. At least Dave was eating the meal he had prepared for him!

"Skillet," he said as he broke an egg into the copper and tin skillet back in the kitchen, "you've been a nice friend to me." He sniffed loudly and wiped his sleeve across his nose.

He ate his lunch in silence. After he finished he went back along the corridor and retrieved Dave's dirty dishes to wash with the rest.

Once while he was washing the dishes he turned suddenly toward the door, sensing eyes on him. The door was just swinging closed. He turned back to his task with a tired sigh.

During the afternoon he divided his time between feeding blank stock to the lathe and filling page after page with detailed drawings and explanations for the completion of the linear proton accelerator.

When he delivered Dave's dinner

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tray at the door to what had been his prison the pages of notes and drawings were also on the tray with a terse note that read: Save these just in case you ever want to complete the only thing my science knows of that might free Bea-Anna.

The notes were gone and the dishes empty when he came back for them after finishing his own dinner.

"MIGHT AS well go to my room and get some sleep," Zaney mumbled, shutting off the water purifyer and putting the dishes away where they belonged.

There was no need of shutting off the lights. The atom power plant of the ship would run for centuries. He left the kitchen and crossed the corridor to the room he had fixed up for his own.

"No use locking my door," he said. "If Dave wants to go back on his word and kill me he couldn't pick a better time to do it than when I'm asleep."

He undressed and took a hot shower. Turning off the lights, he stretched out on his bunk.

From far away came the silent hum of the ship's power plant, so inaudible that its whisper was barely discernible.

He lay with his eyes open. Gradually as they adjusted the room appeared in ghostly outline, a phenomenon all space travelers become accustomed to, caused by ultra-violet radiation exciting random molecules of the air and causing them to emit visible quanta.

"Damn woman," he said after a long silence. "But I don't blame you, Bea-Anna. Guess it's the spinster in you, or maybe you're so far advanced over Davey philosophically that his behavior seems like that of an obnoxious puppy to you. I can understand you maybe better than most. I've been alone a long time myself. Like it. Every time I strike a paying meteor and go on a binge in some spaceport, I swear never again. Then after I've been out in space alone for a long time I get lonely and say, 'Maybe I was wrong. Maybe people aren't as bad as I remember them.' So I go back and do it all over. I'll bet that's what you do yourself. Then you go to some star system and find guys like Davey and Rek Barker, and me. And you shake them off by letting them die of old age."

He sighed loudly.

"You know, though, Bea-Anna," he went on sleepily, "I kinda like you. I sort of wish I could maybe get acquainted with you before Davey shoots me day after tomorrow. But with him being able to read my mind I guess I wouldn't. I don't know why, except that it wouldn't mean quite the same with him...listenin'..."

His soft snores drifted over the gloom. He did not stir when the door opened softly and Dave stood silhouetted against the lights in the corridor, gun in hand, his breathing a rasping animal sound in the darkness.

"I DON'T LIKE this. I'm dreaming, but I don't like it. I'm going to wake up." Zaney mumbled.

"No!" a disembodied voice whispered. "You aren't going to wake up. You're going to stay asleep. And you're going to open that door."

"The heck I am," Zaney said. He drew back in fear.

It was just an ordinary door, innocent looking. He couldn't remember ever having seen it before, nor anything on the other side of it, yet he drew back from it, afraid.

"There's no reason for you to be afraid," the voice said. "When you open that door you will be glad you did."

"No!" Zaney protested. He squirmed in his sleep, trying to waken and unable to do so. "No!"

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The door seemed to come nearer to him, blocking out everything else. Its knob gleamed sinisterly from some unseen source of illumination. He saw his hand creeping toward that knob and drew it back with a whimper of fear. The door receded a little.

"There *was* a time when it was open," the disembodied voice said sadly. "But something closed it? What was it?"

"I closed it," Zaney whispered. "I don't remember it, but I closed it!"

"Yes, you closed it," the voice said. "You closed it because there was something in there you were afraid of. But that isn't in there any more. It's gone. You can open the door!"

"No!" Zaney whimpered.

"But you must," the voice whispered commandingly. "*I* am in there. Not just the other side of the door, but that is the way to come to me. You must open that door *first!*"

"No, Bea-Anna, no!" Zaney said. And as he heard himself utter her name he knew it was she who was talking to him. He wakened abruptly.

He tried to rise to a sitting position on his bunk. A strange, drugged lethargy possessed him.

"You must go back to sleep," her voice whispered in his mind. "Sleep. Close your eyes."

"Yes, Bea-Anna," his lips formed the words silently. He let his eyes close.

Abruptly he became aware that it had been some time since he had fallen asleep again, and now he was standing before the door again. There was no disembodied voice.

Of his own volition he was advancing slowly toward that door, reaching out to grasp its glistening knob. His fingers closed about it, twisted.

Then suddenly he released the knob and drew back.

"No!" he screamed. "I'm afraid!"

The door retreated from him. As the distance increased he felt a desire to return to the door possess him. He ran toward it, and it still retreated. He increased his pace. The door grew smaller and more remote.

Then suddenly he was standing before it again.

"Open it," Bea-Anna's voice said.

The fear was gone. He stepped forward calmly and reached out. He saw his hand close about the knob, twist it—and the door was swinging open.

"The little brat. If he was my kid I'd tan his hide good." It was a shrewish female voice that faded even as it spoke.

"...if he only knew about his mother, but they're keeping it from him that she died..."

"...Johny Johny JOHNY!.... but mommy's dead. I know she's..."

"How did that kid find out his ma's dead? Who told him? He ain't no mind reader. Somebody told him..."

Faint whispers of disembodied memory coming through the open door...then suddenly:

"I could kill him right now, but dammit I can't. He's got to leave. Yes I can. I'm going to kill him when the forty-eight hours are up. I'm going to." It was Davey's voice. Not his real voice but his mental voice!

Its crystal clarity snapped Zaney's eyes open. He lifted his head. The door to his room was closing slowly, cutting off the light from the corridor.

It stopped closing for a pregnant instant, then slammed with no pretense of caution. The sound of running footsteps came from the other side.

"He woke up!" Davey's mental voice said angrily. "Now he'll lock his door."

"No, Davey," Zaney said. "Now I won't have to. You see, we're equal now. I can read your thoughts too."

He caught the startled mental exclamation as Dave received his thought. The swift surmise that Bea-Anna had done this thing. The anger and frustration. The final settlement

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into despondency and gloom.

"BEA-ANNA doesn't love me," Dave's despairing thought came.

Zaney paused in his stirring of the hotcake batter, a troubled light in his eyes.

"I wouldn't say that, Davey," he said aloud conversationally although he knew that Dave was at the far end of the ship, almost five hundred yards away. "She just wanted to give me an equal chance with you. After all, if you murder me she won't like it."

"I'm still going to kill you if you haven't gone by tomorrow morning, Zaney," Dave's thought came grimly. "Now that you can read my thoughts things are even more intolerable than before."

"For me too, Davey," Zaney said. "But how can you kill me now that I can know what your plans are and where you are all the time?"

"You have to sleep," Dave's thought came. "I'm younger than you. I can stay awake longer. When you go to sleep I'll kill you."

"How about tonight?" Zaney asked. "Will you kill me if I sleep tonight?"

"Unless you load the Space Patrol lifeboat with fuel today and take off from Lark Planetoid, yes," Dave's thought came.

"I suppose I could leave," Zaney said, "but I'm not going to. In fact, I couldn't leave you here out of your mind, alone on a planetoid heading out into interstellar space, the way you are. If you were all right you might still go space-wacky, and you're that already. If I left you in the condition you're in it would haunt me the rest of my life. I'm staying."

"That's final?" Dave telepathed.

"Yes," Zaney said with finality.

"Then I'm coming after you now, Zaney," Dave's thought sounded. "From this moment I'm after you, and when I see you I'll shoot to kill."

Zaney sensed the change of impressions in Dave's mind and knew he was even now coming toward this end of the ship, gun out, intent on killing him.

He glanced about the kitchen hastily. There was no way of locking the doors. It would be foolish to stay here. His own gun was in his room. He didn't intend to kill Davey even in self defense, but he might as well have his gun.

He set the bowl of hotcake batter on the table and hurried from the kitchen. In two minutes he had his gun and his spacesuit on. Dave was already very close. He hurried out into the corridor and made his way to the airlock in the foreaxis of the ship.

There was a shot. Something plopped and whined angrily just as he closed the inner hatch. It came to rest at his feet, a shapeless piece of metal.

The outer door swung open. With a twisted smile Zaney picked up the spent bullet and stepped out. When the outer hatch swung shut he held the bullet so that it blocked it open just enough to prevent a perfect airtight seal.

"Now you'll have to use the airlock at the other end of the ship, Davey," he said. "This one won't work."

"You could beat me there and fix that one too, bottling me up in the ship!" Dave's thought came in an instantaneous rush.

"Telepathy has its advantages, Davey," Zaney said. "I'm glad you thought of that. I'll do it!"

He had already shoved out from the giant ship, using his small drive rockets to propel himself along the shell.

He reached the stern of the ship, landed on the platform, and pressed the admittance button imbedded in the shell.

Dave had not attempted to beat him. He was already in the control room shutting off the longitudinal spin motors and braking the inner part of the ship to a halt so that he could

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use the airlocks ordinarily used when the ship had landed.

"There's no way of jamming them!" Dave's thought came triumphantly. "I can pick any one of half a dozen and you can't know which one by reading my mind. While you're jamming one I can get to another."

"That's true," Zaney admitted. "It's too bad I can't bottle you up in this ship. It's nice and big, and you could be comfortable until you recovered your senses."

"Recovered my senses?" Dave telepathed. "Listen you crazy space bum. You went wacky before I was born and never recovered. You don't even have sense enough to know that three's a crowd. Why do you suppose Bea-Anna won't open up? It's because you're here too. If you'd have sense enough to leave she and I could get together. Why do you suppose Bill Hanes declined to come along? He knew that he'd be excess baggage! You should have had sense enough to drop out too!"

"Is that true, Davey?" Zaney said. "You know, I never thought of that before. Why didn't you tell me then?" Dave's words filled him with a sense of horror at himself. "Damn, Dave, I'll get out right now. I can see it all now. What a zaney old fool I've been! You don't have to go gunning for me any more and have a murder on your hands. I'm going to start loading fuel on that ship as fast as I can."

"Get at it then," Dave's mental voice came curtly. "The sooner you get out the better."

"I SURE wish that wasn't true, what Davey told me. I would have liked to get acquainted with Bea-Anna. She's the first female I ever thought I could like. Of course I'm too old for her, but it would have been nice being a sort of father to Dave and Bea-Anna here in our own little world. But he's right..."

Zaney tapped against the two hundred gallon drum. It didn't ring quite empty yet. He went over to the orienter of the S. P. lifeboat. Here in the hole in the surface of Lark Planetoid where it perched ready for flight the orienter couldn't keep bearings on the Sun, Polaris, and Sirius; but its delicately adjusted parts could still do a reasonably accurate job of orientation by dead reckoning.

Zaney fed the data into the autopilot, adjusting other knobs to give readings of full fuel tanks, and destination. His eyes went to the small rectangle of glass behind which the time it would take to return to the vicinity of Mars and the Earth would flash.

A red blot flashed in the glass and died out. That blot signified the ship couldn't reach its destination with the data given and by the ideal method. Zaney gulped. He knew the autopilot was searching now. The processes of mathematical integration incorporated into it were now working on finding the most ideal answer.

Suddenly numbers were in the glass. Zaney stared at them with growing dismay.

"Twenty-two years and six months!" he whispered. "That means it'll take so much fuel to decelerate and get a positive velocity toward the solar system that I'll have to coast most of the way. I'd die of old age before I could get there!"

Dave's telepathed voice formed in his mind.

"You can carry extra tanks of fuel in the cabin," it said, "and also any number of them outside the ship. With Lark Planetoid's thousandth of a gravity pull it's just like starting out in empty space."

"Yes," Zaney said uneasily, "you're right. I can do that."

He forced himself to remain contrite. It was an effort. He thrust from

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his thoughts the little voices of logic that tried to whisper that Dave had been glad enough for him to come along when he thought they'd have to fight most of Rek Barker's men, the knowledge that Dave had been almost willing not to come, and that it had been his own knocking out of Major Tryon that had made it possible. He drowned those little whispers with the stronger logic that Dave was right, three made a crowd. If positions were reversed and Bea-Anna was in love with him instead of Dave it wouldn't be the same having Dave around as it would be alone with her.

"Sometimes injustice is a necessary evil," he said.

He went to the emptying two hundred gallon drum and rapped his knuckles against it. It rang hollow.

"This is hard work," he said, "carting these drums back and forth through the pipestem. Seems to me Rek Barker would have had sense enough to build a fuel dump here when he cut this secret base out of the rock." His face lit up with surprise at the thought. "He must have!"

He left things the way they were and went outside the ship. He stopped in his tracks. The fuel line was in plain sight. He could even remember stepping carefully over it, now that he saw it.

He followed it to where it entered a concrete tunnel. Inside was a fairly large underground storeroom with fuel storage cylinders stacked up.

There were also huge piles of boxed goods, bins of pipe parts and valves, coils of flexible chrome hose, and everything that could possibly be needed for the job of loading the S. P. lifeboat with enough fuel to cut the journey back to the solar system and Mars or Earth to—

"Maybe to ten years," Zaney muttered.

The defiant thoughts bubbled against the surface of consciousness without breaking through.

He plunged into the work of transporting the huge cylinders to the ship and lashing them in place along the hull with thin steel cables run through U hooks welded to the plates. The ship's inner tanks were quickly filling through flexible hosing connected to the pipe that led out under the ship from other tanks.

"I wish you'd change your mind, Davey," he said suddenly. "Bea-Anna is the only female I ever really wanted to meet. I hate going away like this without ever meeting her."

"That's the reason you have to go, Zaney," Dave's thought came. Accompanying it was a flood of half formed thoughts that Dave didn't want to express.

An uneasy feeling rose in Zaney. He tried to sluff it off, but it kept returning. He knew the borderline between sanity and insanity was a very subtle one. Often it was impossible to tell the difference except by the outcome, or by viewing an over-all pattern of thought and action.

"One thing I know," he muttered. "If I leave Lark Planetoid I won't be able to find it again."

A picture rose in his mind against his will. A picture of Dave, completely irrational, unable to follow consistently any plan of action, unkempt, his mind disintegrated into a thousand conflicting patterns at the mercy of the vagaries of unbridled emotions, gradually degenerating until he became a wild animal, alone in this hollow world, batting his head against the impenetrable wall of Bea-Anna's silence. A silence more certain and more permanent because she would be afraid to even maintain contact with the seeds of madness.

"I can't leave if that's what will happen!" he groaned. "And yet, will it? Or is my own mind conjuring up excuses to hold me here?"

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THE SHIP was completely refueled now. Zaney unfastened the flexible chrome hosing from the intake on the ship, and coiled it up and put it away in the storage cave.

As he was leaving his eyes caught the lettering on the side of a small long wooden box. Turnbuckle Jacks, it read.

A plan formed in his mind full blown. Without waiting to think he put the plan into action. An iron bar broke the box open. He grunted in satisfaction as he saw that the turnbuckled jacks were heavy duty ones with extensions.

Already Dave had read his plan and was speeding toward the pipestem tunnel to prevent it from being carried out.

Zaney turned away from the turnbuckle jacks and quickly picked out one of the long cylinders that had been emptied into the ship's fuel tanks. Its mass was over a thousand pounds, but in the weak gravity of Lark Planetoid he could lift it with one hand. Twenty feet long and two feet in diameter, built to withstand thousands of pounds pressure, it would stop any bullet from an automatic.

He carried it out of the storage cave to the entrance to the pipestem tunnel leading down into the planetoid. For a distance of several hundred feet it went without hindrance. Then it began to scrape the sides. It stopped and refused to go further. There was space around it, but none large enough for a human body in a spacesuit to squeeze past.

Trembling with urgency Zaney returned to the storage cave and came back with one of the turnbuckle jacks. In a few moments it was pressed rigidly against opposite sides of the tunnel, its middle touching the end of the fuel cylinder. It was an effective blockade that couldn't possibly be budged from the other side.

"Now, Davey," Zaney said shakily but triumphantly, "I can stay without fear of being killed in my sleep. I'll leave if and when I know you're going to be all right and not before, so you might as well start cooling down and being your old self. The quicker you do the quicker I'll go."

He winced at the flood of wild invective flooding into his mind from Dave's. Along with it was something that convinced him he had done right. It was a realization within Dave's own mind that he was incapable of getting a grip on himself.

"I'll give you no more mercy," Dave telepathed after his anger had cooled off a little. "Your game can work both ways. First I'm going to block the inner end of the pipestem the way you've done at your end. Then I'm coming around in the lifeboat of one of the ships and drop a bomb on you."

A wave of dismay swept over Zaney. He conquered it with an effort. Mild anger replaced it.

"Your plan is an admission that you know you're space-wacky, Davey," he said. "For your own good give yourself up to me and let me take you home where you can get treatments to snap you out of it."

"Look who's talking," Dave jeered. "It'll be an act of mercy to kill you and put you out of your misery. And that's just what I'm going to do. If you take off and try to escape I'm going after you."

"Maybe that's what Bea-Anna is waiting for," Zaney said. "The minute you take off she'll accelerate Lark Planetoid so fast you'll be lost in the void."

"Damn Bea-Anna!" Dave said. "I'm getting tired of her silence and underhandedness in making you able to read my thoughts. When I get you out of the way I'm opening that can she's sealed up in and show her the man's the boss."

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"How?" Zaney mocked.

"I'll find a way," Dave said grimly. He was hurrying back down the pipestem to build his own blockade before Zaney could possibly prevent him.

Zaney turned slowly away from his blockade and started back up to the S.P. lifeboat. He was trembling violently now.

He muttered through chattering teeth, "What am I shaking for? I'm not that much of a coward!" He gave an uneasy laugh. He knew it wasn't fear. It was something in his subconscious. He had no slightest idea of what it might be, yet he shied instinctively away from it.

Suddenly something broke through into consciousness. It was a loneliness, a greater loneliness than he had ever before experienced. It was part of the cause of his trembling, but only a part.

"Gosh, I didn't know I could miss being friendly with Dave that much!" he said thinly.

With the audible expression of the thought he realized it wasn't the truth. The truth was insane. Incredible.

The intense loneliness took a direction, reaching out with an intense yearning—toward Bea-Anna! His trembling increased to the point where he couldn't command his muscles. He came to a stop, not even breathing.

The full realization of the truth flooded into his mind. He loved Bea-Anna, had loved her ever since he received her first telepathed call for help—how many lifetimes had he lived since then? Every atom of his being yearned for her, reached out impotently toward her.

"But dammit!" he whimpered. "I'm an old man! I'm sevent—"

The knowledge that she was thousands if not millions of years old struck him.

"But she's immortal," he whispered. "Physically she's young. Physically I'm older than she. Almost before she can take her next breath I'll be in my grave." He groaned in misery. "But I love her," he whispered.

"SO NOW the mask of hypocrisy is off," Dave's thought came bitterly. "All your pretense that you were so concerned about me and my welfare! The truth of the matter all along was that you wanted Bea-Anna for yourself."

"Damn you, Davey," Zaney said. "You have a way of making things that aren't true sound like they are. I didn't even know I was in love with her." He wanted the thought to stop there, but it completed itself. "And it soils that love just for a space-wacky mind like yours to know of its existence."

"Maybe I am insane," Dave's mental voice said. "Sure. But you're the one that drove me insane. Deliberately. When I've killed you I can get a grip on myself. Not before."

"I hate to say this, Davey," Zaney said, "but you know as well as I do that space madness can't cure itself. It takes months or years of competent help to recover. Help you can't get here."

"For your information, Zaney," Dave said, "I'm not crazy. Just as you came along because subconsciously you were in love with Bea-Anna all the time, so, subconsciously, I sensed that and knew, also subconsciously, that so long as you stayed here you were a threat to mine and Bea-Anna's happiness. I realize that now just as you know now that you love Bea-Anna too. Doesn't that make sense to you?"

"Yes," Zaney said.

"And you can't leave now and turn your back on the one you love. Right?"

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"I—I don't know," Zaney said. "If I knew she loved you, and her happiness depended on my leaving, I think I could leave."

"You're a liar," Dave said. "That's why I can't let you leave now. I have to kill you instead. I can't leave anyone alive that might someday disrupt my happiness—and Bea-Anna's. I'm coming after you."

"Then I'll have to shoot you down, Davey," Zaney said calmly. "This S.P. lifeboat is also equipped for minor combat duty. None of the lifeboats of those passenger and freight ships are."

A string of invectives came as Dave realized what Zaney had said was true.

"This place is hard to find," Zaney continued. "I can see you coming before you can locate my position on the surface, and blow you out of the sky. By the same token you couldn't send robombs without knowing my exact location, and even if you could I would stand a good chance of hitting them. The only thing that can avoid projectiles from an autocannon is something on a nonsense course."

Dave's mental groan answered this logic.

"I can stay here indefinitely, Davey," Zaney went on. "I can wait until you kill yourself with madness; I don't know anything else I can do."

It was a problem. Zaney caught Dave's occasional thought as he brooded over it. He brooded over it himself. The ideal solution, he knew, would be to capture Davey, give him some knockout drops to put him to sleep for twenty-four hours, put him in the S.P. lifeboat and set the autopilot to blast off. When Davey woke up the planetoid would be out of sight in the void. He would be forced to continue on into the Solar System where he would be picked up.

But how capture Davey? Zaney knew that if he made his way around the planetoid to the two mile wide opening Davey could see him coming and knock him off with the high-powered guns there. The rim of that opening bristled with guns Rek Barker and his men had placed there to fight off attack from space or by land.

"It's a stalemate," he groaned. "And it's intolerable."

"A stalemate, yes," Dave's mental voice answered. "As intolerable for me as for you. There's only one way to resolve it. That is, if you're not a coward. I'll start out from the rim of the opening over on this side, on foot. At the same time you have to start out from where you are. We'll meet half way and fight it out on foot with guns."

"That would force me to kill you, Davey," Zaney said. "If I punctured your suit out in the vacuum you'd die."

"It's the only way, Zaney," Dave said. "Are you game?" The tone of his telepathed challenge was mocking.

"There doesn't seem to be any other way, Davey," Zaney said regretfully. "I'm forced to take you up on it. I don't want to kill you, but it looks like I'll have to."

"If you can!" Dave said, jeering.

ZANEY pulled himself up the side of the S.P. lifeboat until he reached its nose. From there he sprung the forty feet to the edge of the hole, lighting on his feet with all the skill of one who has spent years climbing over gravityless rocks in the interplanetary belts.

He looked back down at the ship, debating whether he should take some vital part of its controls, disabling it.

"No," he decided aloud. "If Davey wants to take it and leave Lark Planetoid it's O.K. by me. I have a hunch the minute he did Bea-Anna would

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make sure he couldn't catch up with it again."

He turned the other way and looked out over the uninviting landscape. Here and there was a white patch where gases had formed a hoarfrost. Underfoot the rock surface was jagged and dangerous. The origin of Lark Planetoid was obvious to anyone looking at its surface. It was pure lava, thrown off in a molten condition in some cosmic upheaval, gases in it forming a leavening as soon as the force of gravity vanished, forming bubbles throughout the mass as it congealed. In some places these unbroken bubbles formed ovoid domes of treacherous footing, liable to shatter and send razor sharp fragments in all directions. In other places they had already broken, leaving sharp-edged miniature moon craters that could cut through the legs of a spacesuit easily.

The hollow interior was also easily explained. At one time when the mass was still molten it had been filled. In the process of cooling, the outer few miles had solidified, shrinking, exerting greater and greater pressure on the still molten interior, until finally that crust had given way at its weakest point. At once the fluid interior had rushed out through the opening, the gases throughout the mixture expanding rapidly, completing the ejection of fluid lava until there was nothing left but extremely fragile bubbles that shattered completely when struck by the first inevitable bit of stone that fell through the two mile wide hole, leaving the center completely hollow.

Zaney looked out across the alien landscape, his face creased in grim lines. He was sensing to the full the drama and horror of what lay ahead. Two men in spacesuits, able to read the thoughts in each other's mind as soon as they formed, advancing toward each other across this barren landscape of stone on an airless almost gravityless world, each intent on killing the other. In a few hours one would die. Perhaps it would be him. The thought of that possibility brought a constriction to his throat muscles.

He looked up into the black, star-studded sky. His experienced eye found the sun, a bright star no larger than Sirius. He looked back at the cold jagged landscape, illuminated only by the light of those stars.

And sensed Dave's waiting on the other side of the globe for him to start.

The first few hours would be ticklish wary hours, as each searched the other's mind for possible treachery, a quick race back to get a spaceship in which to hunt down the other. Gradually as this possibility grew remote would come the open advance without fear of either treachery or of meeting each other. Then would come the slowing down as they neared each other for final combat.

Zaney took his first step, an easy, directed push that sent him in a slow arc over a distance of twenty feet while his eyes studied the spot where he would land for signs of possible danger.

HE CAME very close to ripping his spacesuit on a jagged outcropping.

"Damn," he muttered. "I'll have to be careful or this crazy fight'll end before it starts."

He made his next jump carry him higher and not so far forward so that he could come down straighter and not skim so close to the hazardous terrain.

"So you're having the same trouble, eh, Davey?" he said, chuckling at the incoming thoughts.

To one side, a hundred yards away, there was a sudden explosion that sent

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flat slate-like segments of rock flying in every direction. One of them narrowly missed Zaney.

"Either an exploding bubble or that was a strike by a meteor!" he muttered. "That's another hazard to this course. Golf! And par for the course is a hole in one. Ever play golf, Davey? I used to play it pretty good in my younger days."

"Shut up," Dave's thought came. With it came the host of sensations that told of his progress over the surface.

"You know, Davey," Zaney said after an hour of relative silence and concentration on going forward, "the one of us that sees the other first will have an advantage. Mind reading won't take away from that because neither of us is familiar with the landscape enough to locate the other by knowledge of his surroundings."

"What's over your head, Zaney?" Dave asked. "We don't want to miss each other."

"That's right," Zaney said. "The big dipper is up ahead of me. It should be the same with you if we're heading toward each other."

"It is," Dave said, "and we can't lie to each other on that."

"That's right," Zaney said. "That's the bad thing about reading each other's thoughts. We can't lie to each other." He chuckled. "Think what that'd do to civilization if everybody was able to read minds. Nobody could lie and get away with it."

"There'd be more murders," Dave said.

"Pretty soon there'd only be honest people left alive," Zaney said.

"Yeah?" was Dave's dry comment.

THE HOURS passed slowly. Both men were beginning to seek high points that would command greater distances. Both were pausing after each long leap to carefully scan the near horizon for a first glimpse of the other.

Both were carefully reviewing in their minds the various elements of the problem of killing the other.

A gun could be aimed without compensation for distance, since the gravity deflection of the bullet would be negligible. A hit anyplace would be fatal, since it would puncture the suit and allow the air to escape. Leaps should be shorter now because it took almost a full minute on a long leap, and in that time the other could aim and fire if he were standing. Firing while in a leap would be dangerous because it could start a spin that would make it impossible to land on one's feet.

Each perfected his plans at the expense of the other, and in so doing aided the other to perfect his plans. It was impossible to do otherwise.

The tension in each was mounting. Each was breathing harder from the nervous tension as well as the exertion. In neither was there a thought of retreat or surrender. Every plan for treachery had had to be discarded.

"It isn't too late yet, Davey," Zaney made one last appeal. "Throw your gun away and come forward. I'll let you pass if I can see that you will take the lifeboat and go back home."

"Don't throw yours away, Zaney," Dave sneered. "I'm going to kill you even if you're unarmed. You're an unwelcome guest here without the good grace to leave when you know you're not welcome. You've got it coming."

"You get acquainted with a man in time," Zaney chuckled. "Even yesterday that would have gotten under my skin. How'd you and Bill ever get along together? Or is this obnoxiousness of yours just something new with your madness? Probably not. Maybe it never came to blows, but I'll bet you always tried to exert your will

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over him. He probably gave in to you lots of times on your prospecting trips when his ideas were better, just to keep peace in the family."

He chuckled at the flare of anger from Dave that told of his hitting the mark.

"Maybe even he fell in love with Bea-Anna," Zaney pursued the subject. "Maybe that's why he didn't come along with us. He saw that with you it wouldn't be a question of backing down. *You* loved Bea-Anna, so *you* would be the one to get her. To buck that he would have had to do what I'm going to have to do. Kill you. Right now if I knew that it would make Bea-Anna happy I'd go back and blast off, even letting you think I'm a coward. Sane or insane, you're too self-centered for that kind of unselfishness. You got along and were a nice pleasant fellow when you had your way. When Bea-Anna wouldn't give you your way you cracked up. When I wouldn't give you your way you decided to kill me. Now you're in the same class with Rek Barker."

He listened to Dave's dark thoughts for a few moments, concentrating on watching his step.

"The tragic thing about all this for you," Zaney went on after a while, "is that even if you kill me you won't win Bea-Anna. Even if she did love you, which I doubt, she couldn't trust herself to you. Not after all those centuries of security in her prison ship where, if she can't get out, by the same token nothing can get in."

Abruptly each saw the other.

ZANEY saw the flash of exploding powder as he sensed Dave's thought of firing. There could be no sound of a shot with no atmosphere to carry it.

He made no attempt to return the shot. He was too busy scanning the rock where he would land, estimating its value for protection and concealment, searching for a better spot to go to as soon as he could.

The bullet had missed him. How near or how far there was no time to guess at. Dave was aiming carefully now, making sure of his shot.

He sensed that Dave's shot would hit him. It would reach him just as he landed. Dave had the spot picked out and was waiting for just the right instant. At the last instant, in desperation, he pointed his automatic to one side and fired. The recoil pushed him in the other direction.

He landed in a shallow depression six feet to one side of where he had been going to light. He let himself go down, prone. Dave was out of sight. By the same token he was out of sight of Dave. And it placed him at a disadvantage. Dave could come closer, keeping watch on his hiding place and ready to fire at the first sight of his glassite helmet, while he would have to raise himself and be vulnerable for a moment before he could aim at Dave.

He sat up abruptly to end this advantage. Relief exploded the breath from his lungs. There was a small ridge of razor edged rock that still cut off the line of sight between them. Now things were equal. He could see Dave's helmet at the same time Dave saw his.

Dave was circling carefully to the left, still out of sight. He stopped when he realized the disadvantage to the one in motion.

"I can sit here and wait," Zaney decided, and smiled at Dave's anger and impatience to get things over with.

Dave fired at the raised outcropping, hoping the bullet would go through and by lucky chance hit him. The bullet's velocity was too great to shatter. It merely made a small hole.

Zaney started forward happily with

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the intention of peeking through that hole, then settled back when he realized that if he did that Dave could send another bullet through the same area and get him. Dave's thoughts jeered at him over this.

He sensed a sudden impulsive intention in Dave to fire several well spaced random shots through the thin rock wall. As he dropped down behind the protection of the wall of his shallow depression Dave dropped the idea before carrying it out.

But now he was doing some careful calculating. He was studying the image in Dave's thoughts of that bullet hole in relation to angle and distance, and aiming at a spot that might place a shot squarely at him. Even if it missed it might send up pieces of sharp rock that would cut into his spacesuit.

Quick as thought he fired three evenly distributed shots through the thin rock. He sensed Dave's cursing retreat and stood up, aiming quickly at the figure that appeared. Just as he fired, Dave sidestepped, so that the shot missed him. Then Dave dropped out of sight.

ZANEY chuckled mirthlessly as fear rose belatedly in Dave's mind at the narrowness of his escape.

Dave's fear was instantly replaced by anger and recklessness.

"I dare you to stand up with me and shoot it out, Zaney," he challenged.

"I admire your courage," Zaney taunted, "but I'm in no hurry. I can wait."

"Can you?" Dave said. "In another couple of hours you'll start to get sleepy. I can stay awake a long time yet. You were working for a long time before we started out and I wasn't. Remember?"

Zaney took advantage of Dave's concentration on what he was telepathing to stand up. He saw a small part of Dave's glassite helmet and fired at it, aiming carefully; but Dave sensed it and moved enough for the shot to miss.

"Missed!" Dave taunted.

"Yes, but I'm standing now," Zaney said calmly. "I have the advantage."

He aimed at the spot where Dave's helmet had vanished, directing the shot toward a spot he couldn't see, hoping the bullet would cut through the rock without deflection.

He caught Dave's thought of the bullet hitting too close to him and fired again before Dave could move.

In the same instant he knew that Dave was hit, and was throwing caution to the winds with the intention of taking him with him in death.

He started to drop down. He caught Dave's frantic realization that he had shoved himself off balance. Dave floated upward into sight, the escaping air from his suit acting as a rocket recoil to force him still higher.

Carefully he aimed at Dave's gun and pulled the trigger. He saw Dave's gun fly out of his hand. He holstered his own and leaped forward with the desperate hope of saving Dave from death in some way.

In midflight a sudden lonely silence settled on his mind as Dave died.

"MAY GOD have mercy on your soul, Davey boy," Zaney said sadly, closing his eyes against the bloated face inside the glassite helmet. "And as God is my witness, I didn't want to kill you. If there had been any chance to stop this mad farce without that I would have done so." Self accusing thoughts rose in him. "Sure!" he answered them. "I could have gone away and left him here on Lark Planetoid out of his mind, suffering in his madness, to kill himself and maybe Bea-Anna by

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his mad—"

He lifted his head and slowly stood erect.

"Yes," he whispered. "There's you, Bea-Anna. I don't know how you feel about all this. I know that you've been listening." He uttered a snorting bitter laugh. "You know I love you. Maybe it doesn't mean anything to you. It does to me. But I'm not the kind to try to push myself on you. The next move's up to you. I'm leaving. You can stop me with a word. If you don't give that word I'll be shoving off."

He looked up at the stars to get his bearings, turned, and started back toward the S.P. lifeboat hesitantly, listening with his mind, hoping. No faintest mental whisper answered him.

"Course I don't blame you," Zaney said. "I'm a killer now. And love isn't something you can turn on and off. Maybe you loved poor Davey. If you had said one word I would have gone and left him here with you."

He made his leaps higher and longer. There was no further need for caution.

"I really believe you would leave!" a voice formed in his thoughts.

"Course I would," Zaney said. "I wouldn't force my presence on anyone that didn't welcome it—Bea-Anna! You spoke to me!" Tears forced their way out of his eyes.

"In all of these ten million of your years since I left my home planet Tor you are the first one who would have left," her melodious voice whispered in awe. Her thought changed, became sharp. "I can give you immortality, make you young again forever. I will give you my word that I won't destroy you, but suffer you to take anything you want. That word has been given. Do you still say you would leave, to die of old age on your long journey back to your solar system if I told you to?"

She searched his mind, the fingers of her thoughts probing into the very depths of his being.

"You would!" her thought whispered, incredulous, but believing.

"Of course I would," Zaney said. "But you don't want me to. I can feel it."

"No, I don't want you to, Zaney," Bea-Anna whispered, her mental voice soft and tender. "Stay where you are and I'll come in a ship to pick you up. Every step is dangerous in those sharp rocks."

"Bu-bu-but you can't get out of your prison!" Zaney sputtered.

Bea-Anna's laughter flooded into his mind. "Prison?" she echoed. Then, "Yes, it was a prison, impregnable against even the proton linear accelerator you were building. There was only one way of opening it. Even I, by myself, couldn't open it."

"What way was that?" Zaney asked.

He had sat down so that he could devote his whole attention to Bea-Anna. He was marvelling that she could let him in on just what thoughts she wanted him to hear and keep all others from him.

"There!" she exclaimed suddenly. "The shell plate sealing over the launching tube of my lifeboat had grown together from atomic creep. I'll be with you in a few minutes. Meanwhile I'll tell you about my prison.

"You see, civilization came rather swiftly to my home planet Tor, the same as it did to the Earth. But it took a slightly different course. It rose to the point where there were two great powers after a series of global wars, just as with the Earth. It attained space travel just as the Earth. But immediately a final, disastrous war was precipitated, while on your own Earth it was averted.

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"ONLY A FEW million people were left. The cream of the crop so far as education was concerned. They determined to make sure that all future generations would remain at the peak of civilization. They devoted their entire efforts to perfecting science and making a Utopia on Tor. One after another the final secrets of physics fell under their combined attack. They discovered among other things how to create heavy matter of the type my prison is made of. In government they formed a constitution far more perfect than that of the United States and far more rigid, since there could be no amendments that violated the original laws or attempted to make them inoperative."

"Then they were inviting trouble!" Zaney said.

"Not for themselves," Bea-Anna went on. "But because of the inflexibility of that constitution I'm here today. The constitution outlawed capital punishment forever. It also ordered life imprisonment for certain incurable types of anti-social nonconforming individuals."

"Oh oh," Zaney said, grinning. "I can see the ending. "In their methodical way they discovered how to become immortal. After that Nature wouldn't take care of the problem of life imprisonment."

"Exactly!" Bea-Anna said. "Death was obsolete. The number of those serving life sentences would eventually be in the millions, since with the discovery of immortality they had added another law that everyone who accepted immortality must be the parent of two children so that the current generation couldn't endanger the future of the race by refusing to reproduce."

"And you refused to reproduce?" Zaney asked, a twinkle in his eye.

"No!" Bea-Anna said indignantly. "I was willing, but I couldn't find anyone to fall in love with. They diagnosed me as suffering from hyperidealism. I took cures. I took courses. It did no good. They studied me for a century or two, made changes in their formative teaching theory to make sure no one like me developed again. Then under the constitution they were forced to imprison me for life, the sentence being revokable if and only if I eventually fell in love.

"They built the court's order into my prison so that it would open if and only if I fell in love. Telepathically operated relays sealed in tamper proof cases held the doors."

"You poor kid," Zaney said sympathetically.

"I really tried," Bea-Anna said. "For a million years I hung around the sun system of Tor trying to fall in love with someone. Finally it became apparent that under the educational system as it had been perfected it would be utterly impossible for the personality type I could fall in love with to be evolved there."

"Yes," Zaney said. "In a million years that should become obvious all right."

"You're being amused at me," Bea-Anna said in a tone of thought that confessed she was also amused at herself. Then she became serious again. "I turned my back on my race, believing that nowhere in the universe would there be other human beings. For five million years I found none. Then I arrived in this part of the galaxy and found the human race scattered thinly here and there. The constitution wasn't in force here. There was hope again. But the pendulum was over too far toward savagery. I found no one."

"Until now?" Zaney asked softly.

He glanced upward. A small spaceship had appeared above the horizon

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heading toward him.

"Until now, Zaney," Bea-Anna said. "It had to be genuine, springing spontaneously from my heart. Otherwise it wouldn't activate the relays that would open my prison. I—I couldn't fake it or create it by wish fulfillment."

The ship came to rest on the rocky surface a hundred feet away. As Zaney started toward it a door swung open revealing the small cubicle of an airlock.

"Before you come in, Zaney—" Bea-Anna hesitated, embarrassed.

"Yes, Bea-Anna?" Zaney said, feeling himself trembling now that the undreamable moment was about to arrive when he would stand face to face with this woman he had come to love.

"Will you—will you call me that nice name, and promise to always call me by it?" Bea-Anna said shyly. "It—it's what made me fall in love with you, among other things."

"Huh?" Zaney said blankly. "What did I call you?" He stopped, puzzled.

Suddenly a light dawned on him. His bearded face creased into a wide smile under his glassite helmet. Then, slowly, his expression softened.

"Damn woman," he muttered tenderly.

THE END

SPACE SCHOOL NO. 1

☆ By William Karney ☆

"COMING?" JERRY asked Lana, the tall brunette who was taking Physics One with his class.

"Be right there," Lana said, turning from the group of girls with whom she was talking. "All right, Jerry where do we go now?"

"The class-ship is leaving from the south campus. Let's walk over. I don't feel like bothering with a heli-copt now."

The handsome couple strode slowly across the magnificent flaring greenness that was the campus of the Eastern Scientific University.

Other students in the class were converging on the rocket, a metallic sliver of glistening steel which lay in its cradle preparatory to the routine flight.

Soon all were aboard and Jerry and Lana seated themselves in the assigned acceleration chairs, tightened the straps and relaxed with their cigarettes.

"Dr. Fielding's always good," Lana said. "I like him. He makes physics really fascinating."

"Me too," Jerry agreed. "He's got a sense of humor too."

Ten minutes later the rocket bearing its class was space-borne and Dr. Fielding was standing facing his class, strapped in a verticle chair. The lecture began.

"Mass is property of matter that measures its inertia, its tendency to remain in a given state of motion or rest," he said.

"We can best distinguish between mass and weight by showing you the difference in a free rocket. Our rocket, right now—is free—that is, we're not accelerating—" the class felt the peculiar sense of floating that comes with free-fall,— "and we can study the meaning of mass."

The professor bent over and lifted two metallic sphere a foot in diameter in the air and left them poised.

"One of these," he went on, "is a solid steel sphere. The other is a metallic-painted baloon. Now which is which? They look alike and they weigh the same—that is, nothing. How can I tell the difference between them?

"The answer is simple. The steel sphere contains the greatest amount of matter, the most atoms, the balloon the fewest. The steel sphere is the more inert, the more massive. I'm gong to give each of these a push—I'm applying the same force to both. Let's see what happens."

He slapped one of the spheres and it skittered through the room rapidly—just as you would expect of a light balloon. Then he tapped the other sphere with the same kind of a slap. Ponderously it swung into motion, its massiveness apparent in its sluggishness. It drifted slowly through theair until it touched a steel wall with a clang and bounced backwards. Professor Fielding caught it.

"Mass is a measure of inertia," he said, "and it can only be appreciated in free space..." Calmly the classroom in space observed the lavish demonstrations. The schools had followed the times...

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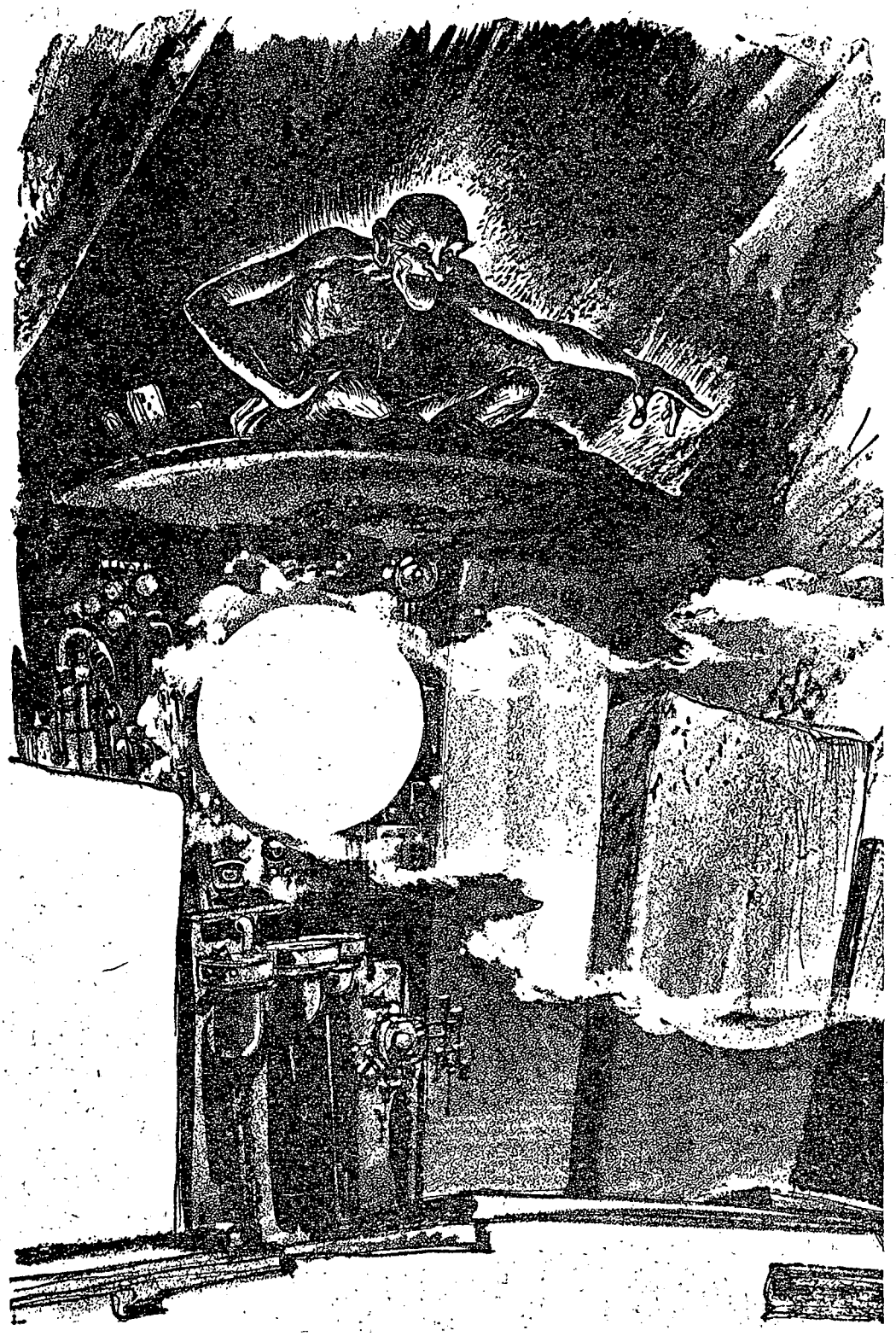

The figure on the dais pointed accusingly at them and a ray of force shot from the machine...

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No Dark Gallows for Me

By John W. Jakse

What weird mystery surrounded the House of Gulbrandsen in the dark Venusian wilds? The price of the secret was death!

THEY HUNG you on Venus. The gray skinned natives were old fashioned by Terran standards, and when you committed a Major Offense and they caught you, there was a public execution in the plaza. They made you walk up the long steps to the platform. They put

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the rope around your neck and their faces might have been cut out of gray stone when they sprung the trap. You dangled and choked and twisted and died on a great black gallows carved from the wood of trees that grew in the steaming jungles.

They hung you for Major Offenses. What the fat man had just proposed was a Major Offense, and yet, I had almost decided to accept his offer.

We sat in the dim bar of the hotel, drinking tall chilly Venusian mak. The fat man massaged his face. "Well, McShane," he said finally. "do we go?"

"Mr. Breen," I answered him slowly, "I've been a professional hunter working out of Venusburg for nearly seven years. But no one's ever asked me to guide them to the House of Gulbrandsen. It just isn't done."

"Well," he murmured again, his little eyes laughing for the hell of it, "I want to do it. I like taking chances. A man in my position has nothing to do but spend his money. It gets damned boring, nothing to do but spend money."

That was it, money. I needed it. I had never wanted much, consciously, because I realized that a man in my position couldn't make a lot. Not too smart, I am, but I found that out long ago. I've always had strength and weak men are willing to buy strength to guide them and make them glorious hunters.

But business had been bad for the last six months. Customers were dropping off. My last one had caught the fever up in swamp country. He died and I never got paid. That was three months back, so I wanted money. Not much; just enough to get off Venus and move to Ganymede. Hunting was picking up there. That's why I even listened to the fat man's offer.

I sat silent for another minute. Thoz, the gray Venusian, polished the bar. Music drifted in from somewhere in the hotel, the crazy weird rhythm of harps and a pair of bongo drums.

"It's hanging if we're caught," I told him.

"Yes," he said, smiling flatly.

"And maybe something worse. Men have gone to the House of Gulbrandsen, and some have come back and not been caught. They say Roger Lorden was one, and that he was power crazy when he walked out of the jungle. He rose to System Imperator. Fontaine came back drunk with the idea of finding beauty in any form. He wrote his poems and died insane, yelling at the wind on a Martian desert." I shrugged. "Those are legends, but the place isn't exactly healthy."

"Yes," repeated Mr. Breen irritatingly, his face hungry. "But think of it. Something new, something exciting, stimulating!" His chubby pink hand clutched the woven table cover and a diamond winked in the hazy light.

"I don't want excitement," I said. "I want money. That's why I even consider. . . ."

"Hello," she said. I looked up. She was warm in her white dress, and not very pretty. Terran, but her face was too wide, her lips too thick, her eyes too dark. Still, she was a problem.

She sat down and touched Breen's sleeve. "Is Mr. McShane going?"

"I don't know, my dear." She'd called me by name, but I'd never seen her before. Evidently the fat man had told her about me. Anyway, he introduced us. Her name was Jan. He didn't say she was his wife, but mistresses were a common thing among the rich men of all the planets.

"If we go," I stated, "only if we'd have to travel light, in a motor lorry. No native bearers. They couldn't be trusted. They'd run away and shoot off their mouths to the authorities,

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once they found out where we were really heading."

"Do you know where the House of Gulbrandsen is?" Jan wanted to know.

"Sure. Everyone does."

"And what?"

"A place. That's all."

"You've never gone there?" Surprise.

"No. I've never had a desire to."

"But he does now," Breen put in, giggling. "A desire for a nice fat roll of credits. Correct, eh McShane?"

I LOOKED at Jan; a physical problem, and I liked physical problems, when I could handle them. She seemed easy enough; not like the House of Gulbrandsen.

She pouted with her sticky lips. "Are we going?"

"We...."

"Yes," I announced, "we're going." Rising, I added, "I don't want to talk about it any more right now. I'll meet you for dinner tonight, if you like."

"Fine," Breen laughed, taking a drink of his mak. I nodded curtly and walked away, feeling the woman's eyes in me all the way.

I said hello to Thoz, the bartender. He had one customer. Sawtell, the barfly.

Sawtell was a fixture in the place; a fixture that guzzled rye, moving from bottle to bottle as other men moved from minute to minute. He had been around the hotel for a long time. Some of the traders said he had once been a college professor. Others related that he had come back from the House of Gulbrandsen, started drinking and never stopped. Anyway, he was a colorless man; nothing more than an ageless walking bottle.

"Hullo, McShane," he shouted from his stool, waving his glass and spilling some of the rye on the sleeve of his dirty whites.

Walking out of the bar and down the broad steep stairway to the hotel lobby, I didn't bother to answer him. I was concentrating on two problems: Jan, and the House of Gulbrandsen. I couldn't decide which was the more important.....

FOR SIX days after that, we got ready; renting a big half-track lorry, buying food, clothing, medicine and Steiner Disintegrator weapons. We needed no maps. I knew where to look.

I saw very little of Jan; at dinner the first evening, and a couple of times in the hotel lobby. But always there was Mr. Breen. Fat Mr. Breen, who peered at me once in a while as if he half suspected what I was thinking about the woman. He was not all fat, I'd decided. He, too, had a kind of ruthless strength. It took power to make a fortune in the brawling star-empires, and somehow I knew that he would be strong enough to kill another man, if the occasion arose.

We kept deathly quiet about our destination. The morning of our departure, I walked up the wide stairway into the bar. Thoz was there as always, eternally swiping with his rag.

He looked at me out of his gray stone face. "A hunting trip, Mr. McShane?"

"Yeah, Thoz, a hunting trip. Give me a case of good Terran whisky." Nodding, he vanished through a door at the end of the bar. Someone slapped me on the back. Sawtell, glass of rye in one hand, gazed at me owlishly from bleary eyes.

"Going into the jungle, McShane?"

"That's right." I was getting tired of the questions.

He grinned crookedly. "You're smart, McShane. You'll never go where I went. You'll never go to the House of Gulbrandsen, will you?" He

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laughed hackingly and downed the rye.

So the stories were true. He had come back. I kept my eyes on the shiny top of the bar as I replied, "No...no of course not."

I must have said it wrong. He set down his glass and murmured, "You know, I think maybe you would go. I think maybe...."

His eyes widened and his scrawny blue-veined hands clutched at me. "Don't ever go, McShane. Don't ever go, or you'll lose your immortal soul!"

Throwing off his hand, I shot back, "Stop talking like a goddam Tri-Dimensional. You ought to be writing their tear-jerkers for them."

Thoz returned silently, hefting the case of liquor. I paid for it and headed out of the bar. Sawtell tagged behind, babbling, "You'll lose your soul, McShane...I know..."

I think I said, "Go to hell," as I walked away lugging the heavy case. Now that I think back, it sounded as if Sawtell was almost...sobbing....

OUT IN THE street, Jan and Mr. Breen were waiting in the parked lorry. The equipment was loaded and the motor turned over quietly. Handing up the case of whisky, I climbed into the driver's seat. Breen was wearing his usual expensive and sweat-stained whites, which he'd have to change for an anti-disease suit once we hit the jungle. Jan was already wearing hers, a tight-fitting rubberized black garment.

Perspiration beaded around her mouth as she pulled on her cigarette. "Scared?"

"Why should I be? I'm getting paid."

"Certainly," Breen chuckled, "getting paid. Perhaps in more than money." Jan looked straight ahead.

I jammed my foot on the accelerator, shifted into hyper-low, and the lorry started to roll.

Right then I should have turned back. I know that now. I should have gotten out, but there was the woman, and the money to get to Ganymede, and the stories of the House of Gulbrandsen that were probably, in reality, only the confused dreams of men like Sawtell. We rumbled through the gray streets, past the gray people who hung you for a Major Offense such as we were setting out to commit. I should have gotten out.

But I didn't.

* * *

Have you ever seen a picture of the jungles, up country from Venusburg? Most atlases have them, and they show the thick dark vegetation, the strange forms of plant life. And yet, they lie.

They don't show the fog that hangs like an endless shroud. They don't show the leeches and the thousands of filthy little insects that stick to your skin and suck your blood. They don't show the monstrous animal-things that creep through the endless twilight. And they don't show the heat.

Above all, the heat. It blankets you and makes you weak. It tears and grates and shreds your nerves. It makes something dark rise from the hidden corners of the mind.

The House of Gulbrandsen was seventy miles from Venusburg. We made forty of those miles the first day. There were roads, if you want to call them that, up to ten miles of the place.

We made camp in a glade, and set up the air-conditioned tents. One for Breen and Jan, one for me, and a third for cooking and washing. In the everlasting twilight, we ate our supper.

No one said much. The other two were tired and irritable from the day's ride. Breen looked pale and even a little sick. I offered him an inoculation tablet against the fever that stalked the jungle, but he didn't want

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it in any manner or form.

"Don't need tablet," he gargled, stuffing a piece of bread into his pink mouth. "Feel fine...fine. Eat, drink and be merry." He laughed and spluttered.

"Oh for God's sake shut up," Jan snapped, rising from the little table.

AFTER SUPPER they vanished into their tent. I sat in mine, smoking and listening to the creech-creech of the insects. I tried to sleep, but even in the icy coolness of the air-conditioning, I couldn't. The twilight had deepened into semi-blackness when I went outside. Striking a match to another cigarette, I climbed up to the front seat of the lorry.

Something moved beside me. My hand grabbed for the knife at my belt, but I stopped.

"Hello, McShane," she was saying. Her cigarette winked like a little orange star in the fetid night.

"What's the trouble? Couldn't sleep?"

"No." Her voice was harsh, intense. "The thought of tomorrow... seeing someplace new and dangerous. I couldn't stop thinking about it. In that way, I'm like him." She motioned with the cigarette at the fat man's tent.

"You're not like him in any other way," I told her.

"No, I'm not. I'm like you, McShane. I've never had beauty. But there are other things more important to men than bodily beauty. Modes of conduct..." She laughed bitterly. "Breen bought those things, like he's buying your knowledge of this country. I hate it, really. I wish...I always wish I could be buying and selling people like he does." She stopped, the thought dying away.

And suddenly, without any kind of dramatic awakening, the thought seeped into my brain. Yes, that would be fine. To have money that could control people. To...I cut off my thoughts. There was no sane and legal way for me to reach that far-away goal. I had to be satisfied with selling my strength, and being practical. Get to Ganymede, that was all that mattered.

I started to reply, and bumped into her mouth, moist and warm on mine. Her arms went around my neck holding tightly. A moment later, she whispered in a damp little voice, "We're both being bought, but we can forget for a while..."

As I kissed her again, a voice shot through the gloom, "Lovely, lovely!"

There was a light in my eyes, bathing the two of us in a white glow. The voice behind the light was Breen's. It sounded weak.

"Get down, will you, McShane? We've got to discuss this." He laughed, and I thought I heard him retch.

"Turn that light away," I told him. Jan sat quietly beside me. Breen did as I asked, and I stood up, ready to jump to the ground.

I saw that he had a small Steiner Disintegrator in his fist, aimed at my belly. He was swaying to and fro, his face unhealthy, his eyes full of hatred.

I jumped wide, purposely. My feet struck his arms and the gun went sloshing into the mud. I slugged him once and he collapsed.

As I was bending over him, Jan climbed down. Breen's skin was blotchy and pale. "It's the fever," I said after a moment. "He didn't put on the anti-disease suit soon enough. We'd better go back to Venusburg in the morning."

"I'm going on," she bit out. "He's always been able to buy everything, but here's one thing he couldn't buy ....safe passage to the House of Gulbrandsen, whatever it is. He wanted to see it. Well, I'm going to have the satisfaction of having been there,

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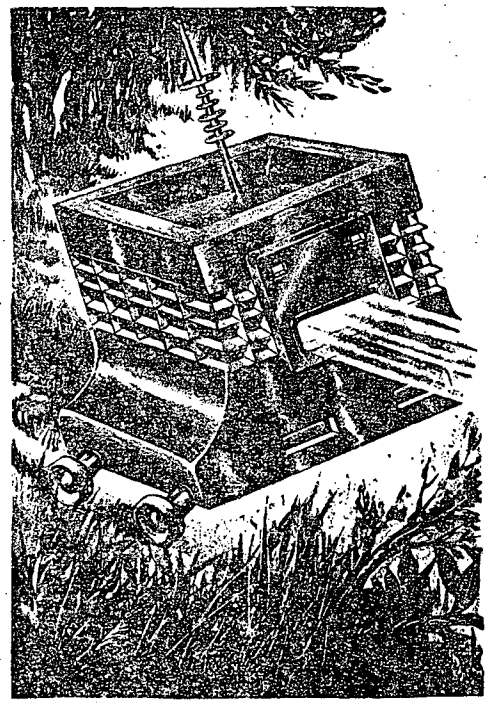

Illustration by Steven Jay Ross

when all his money only got him half way."

"You're sure?" I asked her.

"Yes. You can go back."

She knew, cleverly, that I wouldn't let her wander off in the jungles alone. Death could come quickly...

"I'll go. We can leave him in the tent and set up a Repulse Barrier around it so that no animals can reach him." I lifted the flabby body, dragging it toward one of the shelters.

As I ducked through the flap, I heard Jan say, "I'll be waiting in your tent, McShane."

She was waiting all right.

WE STARTED out next morning in the lorry, leaving Breen unconscious behind an unbreakable wall of force. Twenty miles we traveled through the jungle; twenty miles without a word. I kept my hands on the wheel and my eyes straight ahead on the muddy road. Jan smoked nervously, fierce exultation on her face.

The road ended ten miles short of the place. We abandoned the half-track and made our way on foot, chopping and hacking with bush swords, slapping the insects, and sweating.

At last I pointed up ahead and announced, "There." It was an open tract of ground, perhaps a hundred yards across, cleared of all vegetation. The bare strip stretched off out of sight in either direction, forming a circle of open land that surrounded the House of Gulbrandsen.

Jan rushed to the edge of the trees and started across the open space. I grabbed her arm and pulled her back. "Wait! I told you it was hanging if we were caught!"

She laughed sharply. "Caught? There's no one within ten miles of this godforsaken place."

"No humans," I corrected, motioning to the right where the clearing curved away. A black box-like thing, some six feet square, was trundling toward us around the bend in the circle.

"There's the guard. It's a spotting device with a televisor lens hooked to a receiving set in Venusburg." I indicated a round aperture in the front of the thing. "There are three of those, powered by atomics. That clearing circles the House of Gulbrandsen, and those three boxes move around the clearing at regular intervals. They never run down, and if their lens picks up any human life crossing the path, a picture is relayed to Venusburg and a patrol flier is sent out to pick up the offenders."

"But it can be avoided?" she asked eagerly.

"Sure. The Venusians themselves don't know what's beyond that clearing. And those machines are inefficient. They only spot in front of themselves, but the native police rely on the boxes, plus fear of the place, to

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keep people out. Get down!" I pulled her to the ground beside me, and crouched behind a pale blue fern as we watched the black box roll by.

Jumping up, I yelled, "Let's go. We haven't got much time. Run...and run fast!"

We ran. The first box was almost out of sight, but to the right, where the first had come from, came another. Its eye cell was not quite on us as it trundled around the bend. We pounded across the open strip and I shoved Jan forward to the ground, taking a dive myself. Lying flat, we watched the box wheel by. Its lens remained dark, a sign that we had not been detected.

As we rose cautiously, Jan grimaced and asked, for the second time this trip, "You scared?"

"Let's get going."

The area inside the circle was jungle; no more horrible than the outside, no less. We tramped for a minute or so, and then, abruptly, we broke through the trees.

There, in the center of a second clearing, stood the legendary House of Gulbrandsen!

I was almost disappointed. It was a massive stone place, much like the squat temples of Desert Mars. There was a dark doorway carved through the stone. And that was all.

"So this is the place where men go out of their minds," Jan said hollowly. "Good God."

We walked up the slight hill to the building. It was so simple when I look back. So damned innocently simple...and so deadly.

Cautiously I stuck my head in the door. Blackness. The room couldn't have been very large. I found a piece of plant fibre on the ground and set fire to it. Thrusting it ahead, we walked in.

The guttering torch gave a little light. On one wall was something that looked like a machine. Panels, dials, strange calibrations; I didn't understand any of it. We advanced, the torch throwing a circle of yellow before us.

Jan screamed thinly.

OUT OF THE darkness loomed the figure of a man, seated cross legged on a shelf of stone. He wore a tattered robe, and he looked, how many years old in the knowledge of mankind? His face was a mesh of wrinkles, his hair long and dirty. He held his hand folded quietly in his lap, and his eyes seemed to be the only living things in that whole dim universe. Those eyes burned; burned with the brightness of unborn worlds, with the light of hellish rituals, with the glow of dying suns. They were infinitely old, infinitely wise and infinitely cruel.

Standing there with Jan clinging to me, I only sensed those things. I turned to drag her from that place of the old man of hell when he spoke, dryly, croakingly. His voice was that of one who detests life.

"Welcome to the House of Gulbrandsen. I trust that your true wants shall be satisfied." That was all he said. Jan whimpered softly behind me.

And then, I realized that something was emanating from that machine on the wall. Something that swept into my mind, over and through it. Something so terrible that even now I cannot describe it, can only see its devilish results.

That machine seemed to probe my mind, as I instinctively knew it was probing Jan's. It stripped away the layers of consciousness, one by tearing one, until it reached the root of all being. It tore and flayed, making me ashamed and sick, as if I had been suddenly standing at the altar of a church, stark naked before the congregation. That was how the machine humiliated. The thing...raped...our

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minds.

And as quickly as it had begun, it was over. I felt oddly different. Free. Powerful.

That old man smiled, the torchlight crawling along his wrinkled face in canyons of obscene humor. He raised one wry hand. "Farewell."

Unable to move, I stood there with the torch heavy in my hand. From somewhere, a gust of stale, rank wind rushed through the stone building. The torch flared and vanished. The old man, too, was gone. The spell broken, I whirled, seized Jan and dragged her toward the square of gray light that was the door.

We kept on running, to the circular clearing, where we dodged by the trundling black boxes, and on. I don't see how, but I think we must have run or stumbled the ten miles back to the lorry.

The next thing I remembered, we were jolting along the road back to the camp.

"How do you feel?" I said to her.

"Wonderful, McShane. I don't know why, but I feel wonderful. Was there. . .something. . .inside your mind, too?" I nodded.

After a moment, she spoke resolutely, "I think I'm through with Breen. I'm through with being bought and sold."

"So am I," I said; I didn't know why then, but I do now, and today those words are the beginning of the real horror from the House of Gulbrandsen.

I thought for a while as the lorry bounced along. An idea was forming, slowly, darkly, within my mind. Still staring ahead, I asked her, "Who gets the money if Breen dies?"

"I do," she said, and her voice whispered with death.

That night we dragged Breen, screaming with fear and the fever, from his tent. We tied him on the ground behind the lorry. He kept screaming as I shot the lever into reverse gear, and the half-track backed up slowly and ground him to a bloody mess on the rear treads.

We took what was left of his body back to Venusburg, and told the native police that he had been horribly mangled and killed in a hunting accident. There were a few of the grisly remains in a canvas bag, and that seemed to satisfy the Venusians. I remember standing there before them, opening the bag and staring down calmly at the red horror within it, and not feeling sorry.

Jan and I split up after that, but only for a while. Breen had a will, and Jan would get the money, but I couldn't see her until after the deal was carried through. So I've been waiting here in the hotel while she cleared things up.

And this morning, I learned. And now I know why the road will wind through death and cruelty, and why there is nothing that can be done...

I was sitting in a dim corner of the bar, drinking mak. Thoz was there, still polishing. Sawtell came lurching over and sat down.

"I haven't seen you since you got back," he mumbled.

I didn't answer.

"How was the hunting?"

"No good."

"I heard about the accident."

"So?"

"So," he replied, gulping some of his rye and wiping the sleeve of his coat across his mouth, "you want to hear a story?" His eyes watched me, alert.

"What about?"

"Well, you see, a long time ago I was a professor of Chemistry at the University of Venus, over in Cloud City."

I couldn't help laughing. "A professor? You've been hitched to that damned bottle all your life."

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HE LIFTED one shoulder. "I said this was only a story. It's about a friend of mine, another professor over there; a brilliant man. His field was the brain. My friend knew that the subconscious mind of man would control man's actions, if the conscious were not stronger, and full of conditioned responses like conforming to society, developed from birth right on down. My friend also knew that the subconscious mind was inherently bad, and that it was this deep ego that caused sudden outbreaks of cruelty, and obscenity, and evil."

"This isn't very interesting," I told him, sipping the mak. He ignored me and took another drink to make the story flow more freely.

"My friend had a wife and three children. They were in Cloud City at the time of the People's Uprising. You know about that?" Seeing me nod wearily, he went on, "His family was slaughtered by the revolutionists; butchered to death. But my friend got away. As I said, he was a brilliant man, and like most brilliant men, he bordered a bit on madness. When his family was wiped out, he ran away into the jungle and never came back. I went in to see him, once. He had built an instrument which could reshape man's brain, because he hated everyone, Terran and Venusian alike. He hated humanity." Sawtell was grinning drunkenly, and a nagging fear began to bite at me.

"This machine he housed in a building, and he is there with it today. Whenever a human being walks into the building, the machine begins to function. My friend will die someday, but his machine will never run down. It'll liberate the subconscious mind of all who approach it, making them prey to its drivings. It will wipe away all the mental blocks in conscious thinking."

"Is that place..." I choked.

"My friend's name was Dr. Erik Gulbrandsen. You know the name of the place. He hated life after Cloud City, and he made himself god there in the jungle, changing the life of anyone who happened to come there. I don't know his motivations, really, but a madman's motivations are hard for so-called sane people to understand. I only know I went to see him. Years ago, I had trouble with liquor. Bad trouble. But I got over it. Then, when I went in to see if I could help Erik, the machine fixed me. I got what I wanted, whether I really wanted it or not. So here I sit. A sopped rag full of cheap rye..."

I remembered the legends. Roger Lorden came out, hungry for power. He fought and chiseled and bribed and murdered his way up to System Imperator. Fontaine had an overwhelming desire to find beauty, and he followed it, thought it drove him out of his mind. And McShane... McShane...?

Sawtell was looking into his glass, looking sorry for himself. "I told you, McShane, your immortal soul is what you lost. I wonder what you got in return..."

"Get away from me, goddam you!" I yelled. Thoz looked over at us and went back to his bar rag.

Sawtell staggered up from the table, blubbering to himself. He reeled toward the door of the bar at the top of the steep wide steps. Teetering there, he looked back and gestured with his glass. "Your soul, McShane, your soul..." Crying, slobbering drunk, he started out and down the stairs, vanishing beyond the door frame. I sat staring at the table, the impact of what I had learned welling up in me. Dimly, I heard a woman cry shrilly from the lobby.

Thoz went out and came in again. He glanced in my direction and said, "Sawtell stumbled down the stairs. Neck broken."

I looked at my mak glass, sick.

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Picking it up, I weighed it in my hand and then smashed it on the table top. My hand got cut...

SO THAT'S the way it is. You can see how it works out. Jan and I had wanted to be able to buy and sell people. Before the House of Gulbrandsen, that had been a dream that the rationalization of our conscious minds smashed before it even found words. But now the walls were ripped down. We had gone after what we wanted when we killed Breen. After all, the mind is the only thing that ever stops any of us from obeying the impulses to evil that live in every one of us.

I'm not a lucky man. If I was, I'd have been caught back there by those trundling machines. I'd be hanging on one of the big black gallows in the plaza, with no trouble. Jan is coming to the hotel in an hour. She's got free rein with Breen's money, and we're heading back for Terra, to buy and sell other people and make them dance with the fat red millions.

We've got the money-hunger, and it will drive us. We'll be together just so long, and then one of us will want it all. I'll kill her, or she'll kill me, whichever one it starts eating on first.

Erik Gulbrandsen sits in the stone building up in the jungle, keeping watch over his machine, waiting for others.

He's taken care of us. I hope he's satisfied.

THE END

HIT, RUN – AND ERROR!

★ **By Carter T. Wainwright** ★

THE STORY of the first Moon rocket has been done a thousand times—that's no exaggeration. The fact that it is the one interplanetary journey we are *certain* to see within our lifetime, makes it all the more exciting. Consequently every story we read about the almost-real trip is interesting. And the stories get better with time, because they are strictly out of the realm of fantasy now and into the region of hard, cold, engineering fact. The blossoming of the V-2 and its resultant revival of interest in rocketry, put thousands of fine scientists to the problem. Right now, with the possible exception of fuel, the problem is solved. We know exactly how, when where—all the details—of the first Rocket To The Moon.

With this enormous fund of scientific information at his fingertips, the author of such a story—and we hope there are plenty—can hardly go wrong as far as the technical data are concerned. In recent years then, most moon-rocket stories have a solid ring of authenticity. You feel as if, well, as if this is it!

But it is rarely true that a moon-rocket story is not written with at least one error. This may be allowed as part of a writer's license—but it is disappointing too. And many, many readers catch the slightest error.

Recently an excellent moon-rocket story appeared in a national magazine. It was quite authentically written, though from a literary standpoint it was a bit weak. However scientifically it had "it".

There was one jarring error however that slipped through the editorial blue pencil. And consequently when you finished the story you were left a little annoyed.

The writer had his moon-rocket equipped with a heating device—which is O.K.—but he also had a refrigerating mechanism installed! That is strictly for the birds! The implication in the story was that a conventional refrigerator pumped the heat to the outside! It simply wouldn't work, that's all. The excess heat aboard the rocket would have to leave by radiation. This would call for a network of tubing far above the carrying capabilities of a small two man rocket. Furthermore refrigeration could be accomplished by direct evaporation of gases, a system impossible to use because of the weight and space limitations again.

The problem of preventing overheating in a rocket merely involves a shiny outside surface which will reflect radiant heat—that does it—that's all. No complicated refrigeration machine is needed—nor could one be taken.

This little story error half-spoiled the effect of authenticity which the author wished. Let's be a little more careful, eh boys?

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GEIGER BUILDERS!

★ **By Sandy Miller** ★

THE GEIGER-MUELLER COUNTER is a highly scientific laboratory instrument. It is not so very old, and one would expect to find it confined to the laboratory in spite of the fact that atomic physics has progressed at such a rapid rate recently. The theory of the Geiger Counter is not particularly complex but it is a miraculous instrument never-the-less because it prepares us to detect a *single* atomic explosion or collision!

Yet, within a short time, Geiger counters will be as common as toys. The widespread demand for uranium and related minerals has made the refined instrument an every-day tool of prospectors. The dreadful threat of atomic warfare has put it into the military's hands. And the fascinating scientific aspects of it have put it into the shops of amateur scientists everywhere.

Familiarity with the Geiger counter will be—in a matter of a few years—an automatic consequence of growing up, almost like the familiarity with one's automobile. It is essential that knowing how to use a Geiger counter become common property. For a counter may save your life. It is about the easiest way to detect the almost indetectible yet utterly-destroying, lethal radiation of atomic warfare.

Right now it is possible for almost anyone, for a reasonable fee, to purchase and build one from a kit. The gadget loving American will welcome this opportunity to construct such an essential item.

The Geiger counter basically consists of little more than a wire and a sheet of metal fixed in a glass tube filled with helium or hydrogen. When an atomic particle passes into the gas it causes the gas to break down electrically and a spark flashes between the wire and the plate. This "pulse" may be amplified and fed to a loudspeaker, an electrical meter or a recording instrument. That's all there is to it. It is difficult to realize that one's very existence may depend upon familiarity with such a gadget.

But like the automobile, the Geiger counter is here to stay. Let's hope that we are too!

NUTS AND BOLTS!

★ **By Milton Matthew** ★

ALL THE political talk about the United Nations and the ultimate unification of the world, while commendable and desirable, is still talk. In many more subtle, devious and yet practical ways, this unification is definitely coming about. Primarily it is due to the spread of industrialization around the world, aided and abetted by a good worldly kick in the pants by vast American industry.

Standardization in manufacturing is of course the prime element in mass production. The parts must fit together wherever they come from. With military security the major reason, but with altruistic reasons hovering in the background, their is a strong powerful spread of mutual standards among all the nations of the world. This is most clearly emphasized by the British-American agreement on threads, and the sizes of bolts and nuts. Both have accepted with considerable inconvenience—momentarily, at least—to themselves, mutual standards of sizes and descriptions, so that in a short while fastenings from any part of the British Commonwealth and from anywhere American equipment is found, will be found to be perfectly interchangeable. A bolt made in a machine shop in London will easily fit a nut made by an American machine located in Texas.

The importance of this can't be exaggerated. Since it is things we actually handle rather than ideas, no better argument for world unity can be devised.

The American acceptance of the metric system of describing ball bearings and camera and watch parts has recently been extended to include gun calibers. It's no longer a three inch gun—but a seventy five millimeter job.

By watching for these mutual concessions on the part of international manufacturers, one can see a steady trend toward unification of the world in its most practicable sense, the constructing of things. Whether the politicians will be able to extend this to the world of political ideas or not is another thing, but their task will certainly be made easier.

When an automobile made in Detroit may be repaired without call to that place for replacement parts by the Chinese repair shop, we'll know that a great deal has been accomplished. Keep it up boys, there will be a United World yet!

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The Trouble with

In the Earth's distant future Man had seemingly vanished. There were dogs and robots in his place—and the ants . . .

The robot, the dog, and the raccoon gazed fearfully up the slope of the hill as the ants marched downward . . .

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ANTS

By Clifford D. Simak

ARCHIE, the little renegade raccoon, crouched on the hillside, trying to catch one of the tiny, scurrying things running in the grass. Rufus, Archie's robot, tried to talk to Archie, but the raccoon was too busy and he did not answer.

Homer did a thing no Dog had ever done before. He crossed the river and trotted into the wild robots' camp and he was scared, for there was no telling what the wild robots might do to him when they turned around and saw him. But he was worried worse than he was scared, so he trotted on.

Deep in a secret nest, ants dreamed and planned for a world they could not understand. And pushed into that world, hoping for the best, aiming at a thing no Dog, or robot, or man could understand.

In Geneva, Jon Webster rounded out his ten-thousandth year of suspended animation and slept on, not stirring. In the street outside, a wandering breeze rustled the leaves along the boulevard, but no one heard and no one saw.

Jenkins strode across the hill and did not look to either left or right, for there were things he did not wish to see. There was a tree that stood where another tree had stood in another world. There was the lay of ground that had been imprinted on his brain with a billion footsteps across ten thousand years.

And, if one listened closely, one might have heard laughter echoing down the ages...the sardonic laughter of a man named Joe.

ARCHIE caught one of the scurrying things and held it clutched within his tight-shut paw. Carefully he lifted the paw and opened it and the things was there, running madly, trying to escape.

"Archie," said Rufus, "you aren't listening to me."

The scurrying thing dived into

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Archie's fur, streaked swiftly up his forearm.

"Might have been a flea," said Archie. He sat up and scratched his belly.

"New kind of flea," he said. "Although I hope it wasn't. Just the ordinary kind are bad enough."

"You aren't listening," said Rufus.

"I'm busy," said Archie. "The grass is full of them things. Got to find out what they are."

"I'm leaving you, Archie."

"You're what!"

"Leaving you," said Rufus. "I'm going to the Building."

"You're crazy," fumed Archie. "You can't do a thing like that to me. You've been tetched ever since you fell into that ant hill..."

"I've had the Call," said Rufus. "I just got to go."

"I've been good to you," the raccoon pleaded. "I've never overworked you. You've been like a pal of mine instead of like a robot. I've always treated you just like an animal."

Rufus shook his head stubbornly. "You can't make me stay," he said. "I couldn't stay, no matter what you did. I got the Call and I got to go."

"It isn't like I could get another robot," Archie argued. "They drew my number and I ran away. I'm a deserter and you know I am. You know I can't get another robot with the wardens watching for me."

Rufus just stood there.

"I need you," Archie told him. "You got to stay and help me rustle grub. I can't go near none of the feeding places or the wardens will nab me and drag me up to Webster Hill. You got to help me dig a den. Winter's coming on and I will need a den. It won't have heat or light, but I got to have one. And you've got to..."

Rufus had turned around and was walking down the hill, heading for the river trail. Down the river trail ...traveling toward the dark smudge above the far horizon.

Archie sat hunched against the wind that ruffled through his fur, tucked his tail around his feet. The wind had a chill about it, a chill it had not held an hour or so before. And it was not the chill of the weather, but the chill of other things.

His bright, beady eyes searched the hillside and there was no sign of Rufus.

No food, no den, no robot. Hunted by the wardens. Eaten up by fleas.

And the Building, a smudge against the farther hills across the river valley.

A hundred years ago, so the records said, the Building had been no bigger than the Webster House.

But it had grown since...a place that never was completed. First it had covered an acre. And then a square mile. Now finally a township. And still it grew, sprawling out and towering up.

A smudge above the hills and a cloudy terror for the little, superstitious forest folks who watched it. A word to frighten kit and whelp and cub into sudden quiet.

FOR THERE was evil in it...the evil of the unknown, an understood evil, an evil sensed and attributed rather than seen or heard or smelled. A sensed evil, especially in the dark of night, when the lights were out and the wind keened in the den's mouth and the other animals were sleeping, while one lay awake and listened to the pulsing *otherness* that sang between the worlds.

Archie blinked in the autumn sunlight, scratched furtively at his side.

Maybe someday, he told himself, someone will find a way to handle

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fleas. Something to rub on one's fur so they will stay away. Or a way to reason with them, to reach them and talk things over with them. Maybe set up a reservation for them, a place where they could stay and be fed and not bother animals. Or something of the sort.

As it was, there wasn't much that could be done. You scratched yourself. You had your robot pick them off, although the robot usually got more fur than fleas. You rolled in the sand or dust. You went for a swim and drowned some of them... well, you really didn't drown them; you just washed them off and if some of them drowned that was their own tough luck.

You had your robot pick them off ...but now there was no robot.

No robot to pick off fleas.

No robot to help him hunt for food.

But, Archie remembered, there was a black haw tree down in the river bottom and last night's frost would have touched the fruit. He smacked his lips, thinking of the haws. And there was a cornfield just over the ridge. If one was fast enough and bided his time and was sneaky about it, it was no trouble at all to get an ear of corn. And if worse came to worse there always would be roots and wild acorns and that patch of wild grapes over on the sand bar.

Let Rufus go, said Archie, mumbling to himself. Let the Dogs keep their feeding stations. Let the wardens go on watching.

He would live his own life. He would eat fruit and grub for roots and raid the cornfields, even as his remote ancestors had eaten fruit and grubbed for roots and raided fields.

He would live as the other raccoons had lived before the Dogs had come along with their ideas about the Brotherhood of Beasts. Like animals had lived before they could talk with words, before they could read the printed books that the Dogs provided, before they had robots that served in lieu of hands, before there was warmth and light for dens.

Yes, and before there was a drawing that told you if you stayed on Earth or went to another world.

The Dogs, Archie remembered, had been quite persuasive about it, very reasonable and suave. Some animals, they said, had to go to the other worlds or there would be too many animals on Earth. Earth wasn't big enough, they said, to hold everyone. And a drawing, they pointed out, was the fair way to decide which of them would go to the other worlds.

And, after all, they said, the other worlds would be almost like the Earth. For they were just extensions of the Earth. Just other worlds following in the track of Earth. Not quite like it, perhaps, but very close. Just a minor difference here and there. Maybe no tree where there was a tree on Earth. Maybe an oak tree where Earth had a walnut tree. Maybe a spring of fresh, cold water where there was no such spring on Earth.

Maybe, Homer had told him, growing very enthusiastic...maybe the world he would be assigned to would be a better world than Earth.

Archie hunched against the hillside, felt the warmish sun of autumn cutting through the cold chill of autumn's wind. He thought about the black haws. They would be soft and mushy and there would be some of them lying on the ground. He would eat those that were on the ground, then he'd climb the tree and pick some more and then he'd climb down again and finish off the ones he had shaken loose with his climbing of the tree.

He'd eat them and take them in

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his paws and smear them on his face. He might even roll in them.

Out of the corner of one eye, he saw the scurrying things running in the grass. Like ants, he thought, only they weren't ants. At least, not like any ants he'd ever seen before.

Fleas, maybe. A new kind of flea.

His paw darted out and snatched one up. He felt it running in his palm. He opened the paw and saw it running there and closed the paw again.

He raised his paw to his ear and listened.

The thing he'd caught was ticking!

THE WILD robot camp was not at all the way Homer had imagined it would be. It was not a camp and it was not a city. It was scarcely anything. There were no buildings and there were no streets. Just launching ramps and three spaceships and half a dozen robots working on one of the ships.

Although, come to think of it, Homer told himself, one should have known there would be no buildings in a robot camp. For the robots would have no use of shelter and that was all a building was.

Homer was scared, but he tried hard not to show it. He curled his tail over his back and carried his head high and his ears well forward and trotted toward the little group of robots, never hesitating. When he reached them, he sat down and lolled out his tongue and waited for one of them to speak.

But when none of them did, he screwed up his courage and spoke to them, himself.

"My name is Homer," he said, "and I represent the Dogs. If you have a head robot, I would like to talk to him."

The robots kept on working for a minute, but finally one of them turned around and came over and squatted down beside Homer so that his head was level with the dog's head. All the other robots kept on working as if nothing had happened.

"I am a robot called Andrew," said the robot squatting next to Homer, "and I am not what you would call the head robot, for we have no such thing among us. But I can speak with you."

"I came to you about the Building" Homer told him.

"I take it," said the robot called Andrew, "that you are speaking of the structure to the northeast of us. The one you can see from here if you just turn around."

"That's the one," said Homer. "I came to ask why you are building it."

"But we aren't building it," said Andrew.

"We have seen robots working on it."

"Yes, there are robots working there. But we are not building it."

"You are helping someone else?"

Andrew shook his head. "Some of us get a call...a call to go and work there. The rest of us do not try to stop them, for we are all free agents."

"But who is building it?" asked Homer.

"The ants," said Andrew.

Homer's jaw dropped slack.

"Ants? You mean the insects. The little things that live in ant hills?"

"Precisely," said Andrew. He made the fingers of one hand run across the sand like a harried ant.

"But they couldn't build a place like that," protested Homer. "They are stupid."

"Not any more," said Andrew.

Homer sat stock still, frozen to the sand, felt chilly feet of terror run along his nerves.

"Not any more," said Andrew, talking to himself. "Not stupid any

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more. You see once upon a time, there was a man named Joe..."

"A man? What's that?" asked Homer.

The robot made a clucking noise, as if gently chiding Homer.

"Men were animals," he said. "Animals that went on two legs. They looked very much like us except they were flesh and we are metal."

"You must mean the websters," said Homer. "We know about things like that, but we call them websters."

The robot nodded slowly. "Yes, the websters could be men. There was a family of them by that name. Lived just across the river."

"There's a place called Webster House," said Homer. "It stands on Webster Hill."

"That's the place," said Andrew.

"We keep it up," said Homer. "It's a shrine to us, but we don't understand just why. It is the word that has been passed down to us...we must keep Webster House."

"The Websters," Andrew told him, "were the ones that taught you Dogs to speak."

Homer stiffened. "No one taught us to speak. We taught ourselves. We developed in the course of many years. And we taught the other animals."

ANDREW, the robot sat hunched in the sun, nodding his head as if he might be thinking to himself.

"Ten thousand years," he said. "No, I guess it's nearer twelve. Around eleven, maybe."

Homer waited and as he waited he sensed the weight of years that pressed against the hills...the years of river and of sun, of sand and wind and sky.

And the years of Andrew.

"You are old," he said. "You can remember that far back?"

"Yes," said Andrew. "Although I am one of the last of the man-made robots. I was made just a few years before they went to Jupiter."

Homer sat silently, tumult stirring in his brain.

Man...a new word.

An animal that went on two legs.

An animal that made the robots, that taught the Dogs to talk.

And, as if he might be reading Homer's mind, Andrew spoke to him.

"You should not have stayed away from us," he said. "We should have worked together. We worked together once. We both would have gained if we had worked together."

"We were afraid of you," said Homer. "I am still afraid of you."

"Yes," said Andrew. "Yes, I suppose you would be. I suppose Jenkins kept you afraid of us. For Jenkins was a smart one. He knew that you must start afresh. He knew that you must not carry the memory of Man as a dead weight on your necks."

Homer sat silently.

"And we," the robot said, "are nothing more than the memory of Man. We do the things he did, although more scientifically, for, since we are machines, we must be scientific. More patiently than Man, because we have forever and he had a few short years."

Andrew drew two lines in the sand, crossed them with two other lines. He made an X in the open square in the upper left hand corner.

"You think I'm crazy," he said. "You think I'm talking through my hat."

Homer wriggled his haunches deeper into the sand.

"I don't know what to think," he said. "All these years..."

Andrew drew an O with his finger in the center square of the crosshatch he had drawn in the sand.

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"I know," he said. "All these years you have lived with a dream. The idea that the Dogs were the prime movers. And the facts are hard to understand, hard to reconcile. Maybe it would be just as well if you forgot what I said. Facts are painful things at times. A robot has to work with them, for they are the only things he has to work with. We can't dream, you know. Facts are all we have."

"We passed fact long ago," Homer told him. "Not that we don't use it, for there are times we do. But we work in other ways. Intuition and cobblying and listening."

"You aren't mechanical," said Andrew. "For you, two and two are not always four, but for us it must be four. And sometimes I wonder if tradition doesn't blind us. I wonder sometimes if two and two may not be something more or less than four."

They squatted in silence, watching the river. a flood of molten silver tumbling down a colored land.

Andrew made an X in the upper right hand corner of the cross-hatch, an O in the center upper space, and X in the center lower space. With the flat of his hand, he rubbed the sand smooth.

"I never win," he said. "I'm too smart for myself."

"You were telling me about the ants," said Homer. "About them not being stupid any more."

"Oh, yes," said Andrew. "I was telling you about a man named Joe. . . ."

JENKINS strode across the hill and did not look to either left or right, for there were things he did not wish to see, things that struck too deeply into memory. There was a tree that stood where another tree had stood in another world. There was the lay of ground that had been imprinted on his brain with a billion footsteps across ten thousand years.

The weak winter sun of afternoon flickered in the sky, flickered like a candle guttering in the wind, and when it steadied and there was no flicker it was moonlight and not sunlight at all.

Jenkins checked his stride and swung around and the house was there. . . low-set against the ground, sprawled across the hill, like a sleepy young thing that clung close to mother earth.

Jenkins took a hesitant step and as he moved his metal body glowed and sparkled in the moonlight that had been sunlight a short heartbeat ago.

From the river valley came the sound of a night bird crying and a raccoon was whimpering in a cornfield just below the ridge.

Jenkins took another step and prayed the house would stay. . . although he knew it couldn't because it wasn't there. For this was an empty hilltop that had never known a house. This was another world in which no house existed.

The house remained, dark and silent, no smoke from the chimneys, no light from the windows, but with remembered lines that one could not mistake.

Jenkins moved slowly, carefully, afraid the house would leave, afraid that he would startle it and it would disappear.

But the house stayed put. And there were other things. The tree at the corner had been an elm and now it was an oak, as it had been before. And it was autumn moon instead of winter sun. The breeze was blowing from the west and not out of the north.

Something happened, thought Jenkins. The thing that has been growing on me. The thing I felt and could

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not understand. An ability developing? Or a new sense finally reaching light? Or a power I never dreamed I had.

A power to walk between the worlds at will. A power to go anywhere I choose by the shortest route that the twisting lines of force and happenstance can conjure up for me.

He walked less carefully and the house still stayed, unfrightened, solid and substantial.

He crossed the grass-grown patio and stood before the door.

Hesitantly, he put out a hand and laid it on the latch. And the latch was there. No phantom thing, but substantial metal.

Slowly he lifted it and the door swung in and he stepped across the threshold.

After five thousand years, Jenkins had come home...back to Webster House.

SO THERE was a man named Joe. Not a webster, but a man. For a webster was a man. And the Dogs had not been first.

Homer lay before the fire, a limp pile of fur and bone and muscle, with his paws stretched out in front of him and his head resting on his paws. Through half closed eyes he saw the fire and shadow, felt the heat of the blazing logs reach out and fluff his fur.

But inside his brain he saw the sand and the squatting robot and the hills with the years upon them.

Andrew had squatted in the sand and talked, with the autumn sun shining on his shoulders...had talked of men and dogs and ants. Of a thing that had happened when Nathaniel was alive, and that was a time long gone, for Nathaniel was the first Dog.

There had been a man named Joe ...a mutant-man, a more-than-man ...who had wondered about ants twelve thousand years ago. Wondered why they had progressed so far and then no farther, why they had reached the dead end of destiny.

Hunger, perhaps, Joe had reasoned...the ever pressing need to garner food so that they might live. Hibernation, perhaps, the stagnation of the winter sleep, the broken memory chain, the starting over once again, each year a genesis for ants.

So, Andrew said, his bald pate gleaming in the sun, Joe had picked one hill, had set himself up as a god to change the destiny of ants. He had fed them, so that they need not strive with hunger. He had enclosed their hill in a dome of glassite and had heated it so they need not hibernate.

And the thing had worked. The ants advanced. They fashioned carts and they smelted ore. This much one could know, for the carts were on the surface and acrid smelting smoke came from the chimneys that thrust up from the hill. What other things they did, what other things they learned, deep down in their tunnels, there was no way of knowing.

Joe was crazy, Andrew said. Crazy...and yet, maybe not so crazy either.

For one day he broke the dome of glassite and tore the hill asunder with his foot, then turned and walked away, not caring any more what happened to the ants.

But the ants had cared.

The hand that broke the dome, the foot that ripped the hill had put the ants on the road to greatness. It had made them fight...fight to keep the things they had, fight to keep the bottleneck of destiny from closing once again.

A kick in the pants, said Andrew. A kick in the pants for ants. A kick in in the right direction.

Twelve thousand years ago a brok-

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en, trampled hill. Today a mighty building that grew with each passing year. A building that had covered a township in one short century, that would cover a hundred townships in the next. A building that would push out and take the land. Land that belonged, not to ants, but animals.

A building...and that was not quite right, although it had been called the Building from the very start. For a building was a shelter, a place to hide from storm and cold. The ants would have no need of that, for they had their tunnels and their hills.

Why would an ant build a place that sprawled across a township in a hundred years and yet that kept on growing? What possible use could an ant have for a place like that?

Homer nuzzled his chin deep into his paws, growled inside his throat.

There was no way of knowing. For first you had to know how an ant would think. You would have to know her ambition and her goal You would have to probe her knowledge.

Twelve thousand years of knowledge. Twelve thousand years from a starting point that itself was unknowable.

But one had to know. There must be a way to know.

FOR, YEAR after year, the Building would push out. A mile across, and then six miles and after that a hundred. A hundred miles and then another hundred and after that the world.

Retreat, thought Homer. Yes, we could retreat. We could migrate to those other worlds, the worlds that follow us in the stream of time, the worlds that tread on one another's heels. We could give the Earth to ants and there still would be space for us.

But this is home. This is where the Dogs arose. This is where we taught the animals to talk and think and act together. This is the place where we created the Brotherhood of Beasts.

For it does not matter who came first...the webster or the dog. This place is home. Our home as well as webster's home. Our home as well as ants'.

And we must stop the ants.

There must be a way to stop them. A way to talk to them, find out what they want. A way to reason with them. Some basis for negotiation. Some agreement to be reached.

Homer lay motionless on the hearth and listened to the whisperings that ran through the house, the soft, far-off padding of robots on their rounds of duties, the muted talk of Dogs in a room upstairs, the crackling of the flames as they ate along the log.

A good life, said Homer, muttering to himself. A good life and we thought we were the ones who made it. Although Andrew says it wasn't us. Andrew says we have not added one iota to the mechanical skill and mechanical logic that was our heritage...and that we have lost a lot. He spoke of chemistry and he tried to explain, but I couldn't understand. The study of elements, he said, and things like molecules and atoms. And electronics... although he said we did certain things without the benefit of electronics more wonderfully than man could have done with all his knowledge. You might study electronics for a million years, he said, and not reach those other worlds, not even know they're there...and we did it, we did a thing a webster could not do.

Because we think differently than a webster does. No, it's man, not webster.

And the robots. The robots are no better than the ones that were left to

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us by man. A minor modification here and there...an obvious modification, but no real improvement.

Who ever would have dreamed there could be a better robot?

A better ear of corn, yes. Or a better walnut tree. Or a wild rice that would grow a fuller head. A better way to make the yeast that substitutes for meat.

But a better robot...why, a robot does everything we might wish that it could do. Why should it be better?

And yet...the robots receive a call and go off to work on the Building, to build a thing that will push us off the Earth.

We do not understand. Of course, we canot understand. If we knew our robots better, we might understand. Understanding, we might fix it so that the robots would not receive the call, or, receiving it, would pay it no attention.

And that, of course, would be the answer. If the robots did not work, there would be no building. For the ants, without the aid of robots, could not go on with their building.

A flea ran along Homer's scalp and he twitched his ear.

Although Andrew might be wrong, he told himself. We have our legend of the rise of the Brotherhood of Beasts and the wild robots have their legend of the fall of man. At this date, who is there to tell which of the two is right?

But Andrew's story does tie in. There were Dogs and there were robots and when man fell they went their separate ways...although we kept some of the robots to serve as hands for us. Some robots stayed with us, but no dogs stayed with the robots.

A LATE autumn fly buzzed out of a corner, bewildered in the firelight. It buzzed around Homer's head and settled on his nose. Homer glared at it and it lifted its legs and insolently brushed its wings. Homer dabbed at it with a paw and it flew away.

A knock came at the door.

Homer lifted his head and blinked at the knocking sound.

"Come in," he finally said.

It was the robot, Hezekiah.

"They caught Archie," Hezekiah said.

"Archie?"

"Archie, the raccoon."

"Oh, yes," said Homer. "He was the one that ran away."

"They have him out here now," said Hezekiah. "Do you want to see him?"

"Send them in," said Homer.

Hezekiah beckoned with his finger and Archie ambled through the door. His fur was matted with burs and his tail was dragging. Behind him stalked two robot wardens.

"He tried to steal some corn," one of the wardens said, "and we spotted him, but he led us quite a chase."

Homer sat up ponderously and stared at Archie. Archie stared straight back.

"They never would have caught me," Archie said, "if I'd still had Rufus. Rufus was my robot and he would have warned me."

"And where is Rufus now?"

"He got the call today," said Archie, "and left me for the Building."

"Tell me," said Homer. "Did anything happen to Rufus before he left? Anything unusual? Out of the ordinary?"

"Nothing," Archie told him, "Except that he fell into an ant hill. He was a clumsy robot. A regular stumble bum...always tripping himself, getting tangled up. He wasn't co-or-

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dinated just the way he should be. He had a screw loose someplace."

Something black and tiny jumped off of Archie's nose, raced along the floor. Archie's paw went out in a lightning stroke and scooped it up.

"You better move back a ways," Hezekiah warned Homer. "He's simply dripping fleas."

"It's not a flea," said Archie, puffing up in anger. "It is something else. I caught it this afternoon. It ticks and it looks like an ant, but it isn't one."

The thing that ticked oozed between Archie's claws and tumbled to the floor. It landed right side up and was off again. Archie made a stab at it, but it zig-zagged out of reach. Like a flash it reached Hezekiah and streaked up his leg.

Homer came to his feet in a sudden flash of knowledge.

"Quick!" he shouted. "Get it! Catch it! Don't let it..."

But the thing was gone.

Slowly Homer sat down again. His voice was quiet now, quiet and almost deadly.

"Wardens," he said, "take Hezekiah into custody. Don't leave his side, don't let him get away. Report to me everything he does."

Hezekiah backed away.

"But I haven't done a thing."

"No," said Homer, softly. "No, you haven't yet. But you will. You'll get the Call and you'll try to desert us for the Building. And before we let you go, we'll find out what it is that made you do it. What it is and how it works."

Homer turned around, a doggish grin wrinkling up his face.

"And, now, Archie..."

But there was no Archie.

There was an open window. And there was no Archie.

HOMER stirred on his bed of hay, unwilling to awake, a growl gurgling in his throat.

Getting old, he thought. Too many years upon me, like the years upon the hills. There was a time when I'd be out of bed at the first sound of something at the door, on my feet, with hay sticking in my fur, barking my head off to let the robots know.

The knock came again and Homer staggered to his feet.

"Come in," he yelled. "Cut out the racket and come in."

The door opened and it was a robot, but a bigger robot than Homer had ever seen before. A gleaming robot, huge and massive, with a polished body that shone like slow fire even in the dark. And riding on the robot's shoulder was Archie, the raccoon.

"I am Jenkins," said the robot. "I came back tonight."

Homer gulped and sat down very slowly.

"Jenkins," he said. "There are stories...legends...from the long ago."

"No more than a legend?" Jenkins asked.

"That's all," said Homer. "A legend of a robot that looked after us. Although Andrew spoke of Jenkins this afternoon as if he might have known him. And there is a story of how the Dogs gave you a body on your seven thousandth birthday and it was a marvelous body that..."

His voice ran down...for the body of the robot that stood before him with the raccoon perched on his shoulder...that body could be none other than the birthday gift.

"And Webster House?" asked Jenkins. "You still keep Webster House?"

"We still keep Webster House," said Homer. "We keep it as it is. It's a thing we have to do."

"The websters?"

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"There aren't any websters."

Jenkins nodded at that. His body's hair-trigger sense had told him there were no websters. There were no webster vibrations. There was no thought of websters in the minds of things he'd touched.

And that was as it should be.

He came slowly across the room, soft-footed as a cat despite his mighty weight, and Homer felt him moving, felt the friendliness and kindness of the metal creature, the protectiveness of the ponderous strength within him.

Jenkins squatted down beside him.

"You are in trouble," Jenkins said.

Homer stared at him.

"The ants," said Jenkins. "Archie told me. Said you were troubled by the ants."

"I went to Webster House to hide," said Archie. "I was scared you would hunt me down again and I thought that Webster House..."

"Hush, Archie," Jenkins told him. "You don't know a thing about it. You told me that you didn't. You just said the Dogs were having trouble with the ants."

He looked at Homer.

"I suppose they are Joe's ants," he said.

"So you know about Joe," said Homer. "So there was a man called Joe."

Jenkins chuckled. "Yes, a trouble-maker. But likeable at times. He had the devil in him."

Homer said: "They're building. They get the robots to work for them and they are putting up a building."

"Surely," said Jenkins, "even ants have the right to build."

"But they're building too fast. They'll push us off the Earth. Another thousand years or so and they'll cover the whole Earth if they keep on building at the rate they've been."

"And you have no place to go? That's what worries you."

"Yes, we have a place to go. Many places. All the other worlds. The cobbly worlds."

JENKINS nodded gravely. "I was in a cobbly world. The first world after this. I took some websters there five thousand years ago. I just came back tonight. And I know the way you feel. No other world is home. I've hungered for the Earth for almost every one of those five thousand years. I came back to Webster House and I found Archie there. He told me about the ants and so I came up here. I hope you do not mind."

"We are glad you came," said Homer, softly.

"These ants," said Jenkins. "I suppose you want to stop them."

Homer nodded his head.

"There is a way," said Jenkins. "I know there is a way. The websters had a way if I could just remember. But it's so long ago. And it's a simple way, I know. A very simple way."

His hand came up and scraped back and forth across his chin.

"What are you doing that for?" Archie asked.

"Eh?"

"Rubbing your face that way. What do you do it for?"

Jenkins dropped his hand. "Just a habit, Archie. A webster gesture. A way they had of thinking. I picked it up from them."

"Does it help you think?"

"Well, maybe. Maybe not. It seemed to help the websters. Now what would a webster do in a case like this? The websters could help us. I know they could..."

"The websters in the cobbly world," said Homer.

Jenkins shook his head. "There

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aren't any websters there."

"But you said you took some back."

"I know. But they aren't there now. I've been alone in the cobbly world for almost four thousand years."

"Then there aren't websters anywhere. The rest went to Jupiter. Andrew told me that. Jenkins, where is Jupiter?"

"Yes, there are," said Jenkins. "There are some websters left, I mean. Or there used to be. A few left at Geneva."

"It won't be easy," Homer said. "Not even for a webster. Those ants are smart. Archie told you about the flea he found."

"It wasn't any flea," said Archie.

"Yes, he told me," Jenkins said. "Said it got onto Hezekiah."

"Not onto," Homer told them. "Into is the word. It wasn't a flea.... it was a robot, a tiny robot. It drilled a hole in Hezekiah's skull and got into his brain. It sealed the hole behind it."

"And what is Hezekiah doing now?"

"Nothing," said Homer. "But we are pretty sure what he will do as soon as the ant robot gets the setup fixed. He'll get the Call. He'll get the call to go and work on the Building."

Jenkins nodded. "Taking over," he said. "They can't do a job like that themselves, so they take control of things that can."

He lifted his hand again and scraped it across his chin.

"I wonder if Joe knew," he mumbled. "When he played god to the ants I wonder if he knew."

But that was ridiculous. Joe never could have known. Even a mutation like Joe could not have looked twelve thousand years ahead.

SO LONG ago, thought Jenkins. So many things have happened. Bruce Webster was just starting to experiment with dogs, had no more than dreamed his dream of talking, thinking dogs that would go down the path of destiny paw in hand with Man...not knowing then that Man within a few short centuries would scatter to the four winds of eternity and leave the Earth to robot and to dog. Not knowing then that even the name of Man would be forgotten in the dust of years, that the race would come to be known by the name of a single family.

And yet, thought Jenkins, if it was to be any family, the Websters were the ones. I can remember them as if it were yesterday. Those were the days when I thought of myself as a Webster, too.

Lord knows, I tried to be. I did the best I could. I stood by the Webster dogs when the race of men had gone and finally I took the last bothersome survivors of that madcap race into another world to clear the way for Dogs...so that the Dogs could fashion the Earth in the way they planned.

And now even those last bothersome survivors have gone...someplace, somewhere...I wish that I could know. Escaped into some fantasy of the human mind. And the men on Jupiter are not even men, but something else. And Geneva is shut off...blocked off from the world.

Although it can't be farther away or blocked more tightly than the world from which I came. If only I could learn how it was I traveled from the exile cobbly world back to Webster House...then, maybe, perhaps, somehow or other, I could reach Geneva.

A new power, he told himself. A new ability. A thing that grew upon me without my knowing that it grew. A thing that every man and every robot...and perhaps every dog...

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could have if he but knew the way.

Although it may be my body that made it possible...this body that the Dogs gave me on my seven thousandth birthday. A body that has more than any body of flesh and blood has ever quite attained. A body that can know what a bear is thinking or a fox is dreaming, that can feel the happy little mouse thoughts running in the grass.

Wish fulfillment. That might be it. The answer to the strange, illogical yearnings for things that seldom are and often cannot be. But all of which are possible if one knows the way, if one can grow or develop or graft onto oneself the new ability that directs the mind and body to the fulfillment of the wish.

I walked the hill each day, he remembered. Walked there because I could not stay away, because the longing was so strong, steeling myself against looking too closely, for there were differences I did not wish to see.

I walked there a million times and it took that many times before the power within me was strong enough to take me back.

For I was trapped. The word, the thought, the concept that took me into the cobbly world was a one way ticket and while it took me there it could not take me back. But there was another way, a way I did not know. That even now I do not know.

"You said there was a way," urged Homer.

"A way?"

"Yes, a way to stop the ants."

Jenkins nodded. "I am going to find out. I'm going to Geneva."

JON WEBSTER awoke.

And this is strange, he thought, for I said eternity.

I was to sleep forever and forever has no end.

All else was mist and the greyness of sleep forgetfulness, but this much stood out with mind-sharp clarity. Eternity, and this was not eternity.

A word ticked at his mind, like feeble tapping on a door that was far away.

He lay and listened to the tapping and the word became two words... words that spoke his name:

"Jon Webster. Jon Webster." On and on, on and on. Two words tapping at his brain.

"Jon Webster."

"Jon Webster."

"Yes," said Webster's brain and the words stopped and did not come again.

Silence and the thinning of the mists of forgetfulness. And the trickling back of memory. One thing at a time.

There was a city and the name of the city was Geneva.

Men lived in the city, but men without a purpose.

The Dogs lived outside the city... in the whole world outside the city. The Dogs had purpose and a dream.

Sara climbed the hill to take a century of dreams.

And I...I, thought Jon Webster, climbed the hill and asked for eternity. This is not eternity.

"This is Jenkins, Jon Webster."

"Yes, Jenkins," said Jon Webster, and yet he did not say it, not with lip and tongue and throat, for he felt the fluid that pressed around his body inside its cylinder, fluid that fed him and kept him from dehydrating. Fluid that sealed his lips and eyes and ears.

"Yes, Jenkins," said Webster, speaking with his mind. "I remember you. I remember you now. You were with the family from the very first. You helped us teach the Dogs. You stayed with them when the family

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was no more."

"I am still with them," said Jenkins.

"I sought eternity," said Webster. "I closed the city and sought eternity."

"We often wondered," Jenkins told him. "Why did you close the city?"

"The Dogs," said Webster's mind. "The Dogs had to have their chance. Man would have spoiled their chance."

"The dogs are doing well," said Jenkins.

"But the city is open now?"

"No, the city still is closed."

"But you are here."

"Yes, but I'm the only one who knows the way. And there will be no others. Not for a long time, anyway."

"Time," said Webster. "I had forgotten time. How long is it, Jenkins?"

"Since you closed the city? Ten thousand years or so."

"And there are others?"

"Yes, but they are sleeping."

"And the robots? The robots still keep watch?"

"The robots still keep watch."

Webster lay quietly and a peace came upon his mind. The city still was closed and the last of men were sleeping. The Dogs were doing well and the robots stayed on watch.

"You should not have wakened me," he said. "You should have let me sleep."

"There was a thing I had to know. I knew it once, but I have forgotten and it is very simple. Simple and yet terribly important."

Webster chuckled in his brain. "What is it, Jenkins?"

"It's about ants," said Jenkins. "Ants used to trouble men. What did you do about it?"

"Why, we poisoned them," said Webster.

Jenkins gasped. "Poisoned them!"

"Yes," said Webster. "A very simple thing. We used a base of syrup, sweet, to attract the ants. And we put poison in it, a poison that was deadly to ants. But we did not put in enough of it to kill them right away. A slow poison, you see, so they would have time to carry it to the nest. That way we killed many instead of just two or three."

Silence hummed in Webster's head . . . the silence of no thought, no word.

"Jenkins," he said. "Jenkins, are you . . ."

"Yes, Jon Webster, I am here."

"That is all you want?"

"That is all I want."

"I can go to sleep again."

"Yes, Jon Webster. Go to sleep again."

JENKINS stood upon the hilltop and felt the first rough forerunning wind of winter whine across the land. Below him the slope that ran down to the river was etched in black and grey with the leafless skeletons of trees.

To the northeast rose the shadow-shape, the cloud of evil omen that was called the Building. A growing thing spawned in the mind of ants, built for what purpose and to what end no thing but an ant could even closely guess.

But there was a way to deal with ants.

The human way.

The way Jon Webster had told him after ten thousand years of sleep. A simple way and a fundamental way, a brutal, but efficient way. You took some syrup, sweet, so the ants would like it, and you put some poison in it . . . slow poison so it wouldn't work too fast.

The simple way of poison, Jenkins said. The very simple way.

Except it called for chemistry and the Dogs knew no chemistry.

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Except it called for killing and there was no killing.

Not even fleas, and the Dogs were pestered plenty by the fleas. Not even ants. . . and the ants threatened to dispossess the animals of the world they called their birthplace.

There had been no killing for five thousand years or more. The idea of killing had been swept from the minds of things.

And it is better that way, Jenkins told himself. Better that one should lose a world than go back to killing.

He turned slowly and went down the hill.

Homer would be disappointed, he told himself.

Terribly disappointed when he found the websters had no way of dealing with the ants. . .

THE END

SOLAR BOREALIS

★ By JON BARRY ★

NOT MANY years ago the aurora borealis was a phenomenon which mystified scientists and there were many theories explaining it. The Northern Lights were presumed to originate because of the Earth's magnetic field and even cosmic rays were accused of causing the effect. Recently it has been clearly demonstrated that the aurora borealis is essentially due to the bombardment of the atmosphere by hydrogen particles from the Sun!

The discovery has been affected by observing the strong correlation between sun-spot activity and the subsequent auroral activity. In the most recent case a terrific series of solar prominences were observed and these huge blasts of gas from the sun's surface were identified spectroscopically as hydrogen gas. Then some fifteen hours later, intense aurora borealis activity was observed. This observation alone would be insufficient to suppose that the former was the cause of the latter. Powerful and sensitive electrical instruments however recorded that such was the case. The hydrogen atoms travelling through space at eighteen hundred miles per second struck the Earth's atmosphere and were ionized and electrically charged with such spectacular effect.

The ionization of a gas, the knocking off and gaining of electrons, is easily detectible with modern instruments. Hence definite confirmation of the Sun's causing of the aurora borealis could be obtained. That there are undoubtedly complicating factors is certain. The aurora borealis is not due simply to hydrogen atom bombardment, but it is one of the major causes.

At least science is no longer completely in the dark about the origin of this striking visual phenomenon and with the clues already provided it won't be long before a detailed explanation and analysis will be forth coming. Bit by bit, we probe our way into the secrets of the Solar System—slowly but surely!

INTERSTELLAR LENS

★ By L. A. BURT ★

WE ARE only just beginning to understand some of the fantastic things which happen in the remote depths of space. The mystery of novae, the shifting of the wave-length of light, the idea of the expanding universe—these things are still great mysteries.

Recently scientists have discovered another unusual effect which startles one with the very magnitude of its effect. In the constellation of Herpens, astronomers have discovered a fuzzy, haloed object whose behavior can only be accounted for by the fact that it is a remote galaxy consisting of hundreds of millions of suns, and which behaves exactly like a huge lens! That is, it focuses the light of a galaxy behind much as a lens focuses light.

To understand this strange phenomenon, we must refer back to that crucial experiment of Einstein's which disclosed that the light of a star is actually bent or deviated when it passes near a massive body like the sun or another star. The explanation given is that light passes actually through a warped space near the star and so is deviated.

Now imagine two enormous galaxies located in line with one another along a line of sight joining our system. The distance between the galaxies is fantastic of course as well as their size. They are made up of hundreds of millions of individual stars.

Now when the light from the most remote galaxy passes through the nearer galaxy on its way to us, by this space-warping action it is bent and deviated and what we see, is not the conventional galaxy but rather a fuzzy, distorted image of that galaxy, just as if it had been passed through a huge imperfect lens!

This phenomenon will introduce a number of new questions to astronomers but it may also provide some sort of an answer as to what is happening in terms of an expanding or decreasing universe. The stars at night, don't shine so bright...

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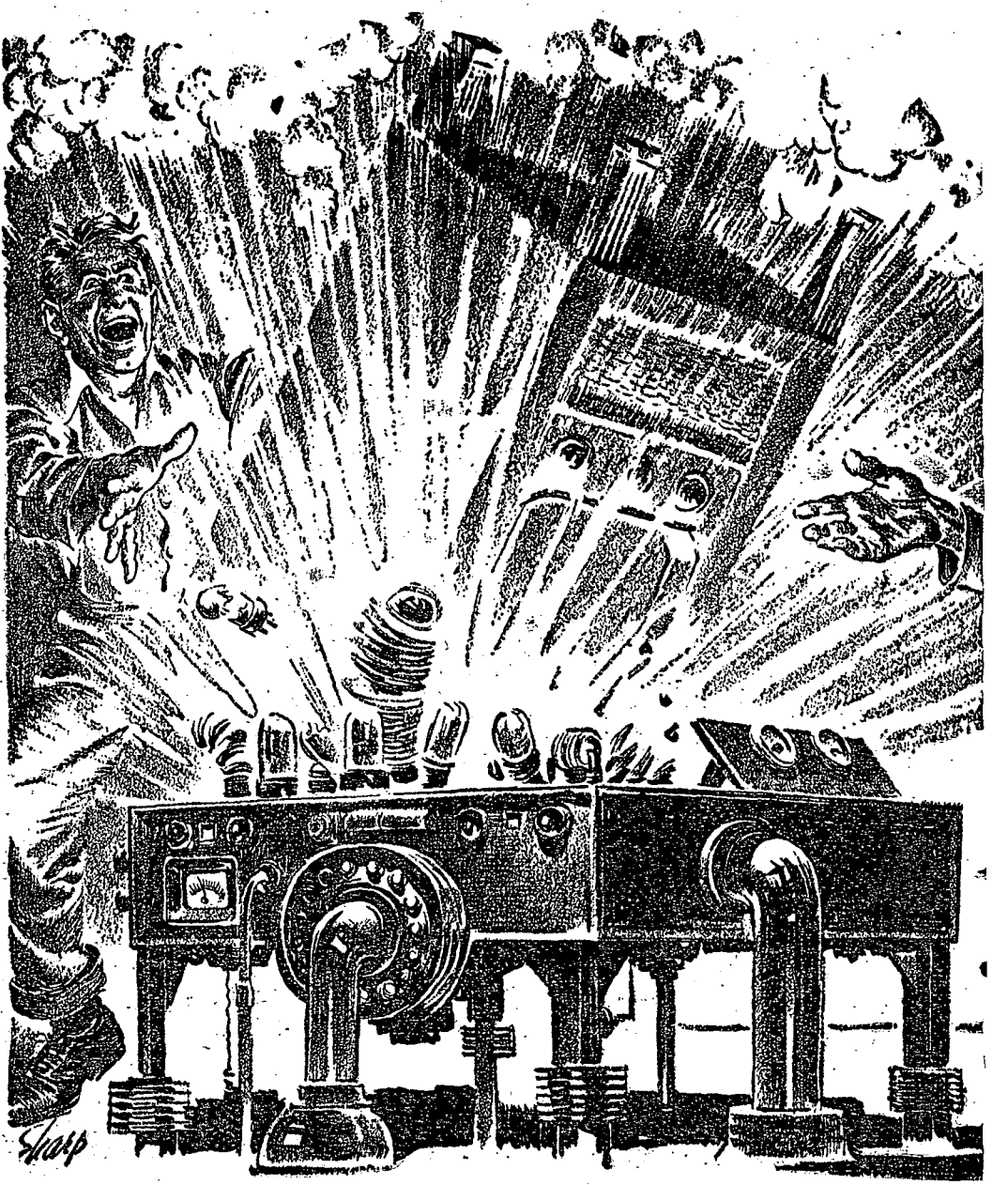
The RADIANT MENACE

By Geoff St. Reynard



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Earth had always resisted any invader; but the Martians used a new type of weapon— softly rounded curves instead of cold steel!

NOW I ADMIT that when this menace to the human race first showed up, none of us recognized it for that; why, if you'd come in and said "Menace!" to us during those early days, we'd have laughed in your face. Or more likely booted you out the nearest exit for disturbing us in the midst of our gleeful appreciation and bug-eyed, open-mouthed, whole-hearted absorption. But it's the same story with all the big dangerous things, I guess. The old men can remember long-ago times when splitting the atom was a topic for happy conjecture as to its unalloyed benefits, and for bad jokes about scientists with wee tiny hammers and chisels. Gunpowder in its infancy, they tell me, was brewed exclusively for use in Chinese firecrackers. Forty-odd years ago there was a strutting little posturer called Adolf who had such big ideas and looked

As he tripped over the cable there was a blinding flash from the machine...

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so comical that half the world thought he was a clown, for the first couple of years.... So it goes, so it always goes.

I'm with Trivideo Inc. I install those big three-dimensional television sets, once in a while I do a simple servicing job, and maybe twice a year I'll put in one of the antiquated two-plane sets for some diehard gaffer who's trying to recapture the good old days. I don't know a lot about electronics; I don't even know a voluminous amount on electricity. I'm just a good mechanic, and have been tinkering with these apparatuses so long that I can tell by instinct what to jiggle or attach or switch when anything goes wrong. I'm pretty good at my job, if I do say so.

This morning I'm talking about, I went out to install one of our 44-N models. The 44-N is a beautiful piece of expensive intricacy. It has a plastimahogany case, stands five feet three on its rubberoid paws, and sports a screen that's three feet wide and as deep as any you'll find on the market today. It is a gorgeous job. We're proud of the 44-N at Trivideo Inc. And with all its massiveness, it weighs only about thirty-five pounds, on account of the light plastimahogany, which was developed by one of our own research boys at the New York plant.

Ed Hornigold went with me to help with the installation. Ordinarily I'd have gone alone, because one man can handle the 44-N by himself if he's careful. But we were putting this set in for a VIJ, a Very Important Joe. He was a scientist himself, this Joe, among other vocations too numerous to remember, and so Ed went along to talk intelligently to him about the internal workings of old 44-N. I can plug them in and twiddle their knobs and fix them so they'll work like a dream, but let a customer who knows his waves and images start to ask penetrating questions, and I'm *done*. Hence Ed Hornigold.

Well, we parked in front of this VIJ's house, a fine tall stone place in the suburbs of South Einsteinville, and I went around to the back of the truck to hand the bulky set down to Ed, and between us we carried it over the stoop. I rang the door chimes. Deep in the house we could hear them play the first few bars of something which Ed informed me was the Vivaldi Concerto in A Minor. "This lad's a lover of good music, Bill," he said further.

"He sure is. What've you got on your chimes this week, Ed?"

"An American in Paris."

"I got the Lunar Blues, the whole doggone thing. My wife loves it. She keeps sending the kids out to push the button."

"You, I suppose you prefer Bach. Old Bill, reeking with culture."

"Hell, yes," I said, and then the door opened and we plucked up the set and took it inside.

"Doctor James Garvin?" I asked the big blond fellow with fire-blue eyes, and he nodded. "Where do you want this set, sir?"

"Up in my lab. Follow me, gentlemen." He clicked a switch and some steps dropped from the ceiling and we all went up to the second floor, emerging in the middle of a casual-looking welter of flasks, burners, convoluted tubes, precision instruments, generators, machines with spines and nodes and spark-gaps and all that sort of intricate expensiveness, and in short more gadgetry than I'd seen in a month of Wednesdays. I stared around and my eye met that of a whopping big robot that was standing in a corner with half his metal viscera scattered on a bench before him. I gulped. The eye looked reproachful, as though I'd done all that to him.

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Hastily I gaped elsewhere.

GARVIN FLICKED another switch and the stairs folded up into the interspace between stories, making a flat floor where there had been a stairwell. Very neat thing. Saves a lot of space, I guess. Me, I like the old-fashioned steps that are built to stay in one place; they give you more confidence.

We'd set the big 44-N down. Now Doc Garvin, who was quite muscular and good-looking for a scientist, pointed to a wall and said, "Over there, please." So rough and rugged old Bill had to show off, and prove what a dexterous, powerful brute he was, to dispel some of the inferiority complex that had swamped him in the presence of the best known adventurer-savant in the States; and so fat-headed Bill—that's me, in case you're confused—picked up the whole weighty-looking 44-N trivideo set and murmured in an offhand manner, "Over there, eh, Doc?" Brash as hell and twice as stupid.

"Let me give you a hand, Bill," said Ed. He knew that I wrestle these light jobs around by myself all the time, but he had a premonition, I suppose.

Oh, no. Cave-boy Bill can cart it over with one hand. Look at me. I may not have seventy-two honorary letters after my name, nor be a top atomic physicist and the first man to see the other side of Luna, nor be as noble-looking as Errol Twofist the movie star, but by gosh I can tote thirty-five pounds of expensive plastimahogany and alumisteel innards with my thumb and two fingers. I brushed Ed aside and strutted across the lab.

"Look out for the—" said Garvin urgently.

Something caught at my ankle. I felt for one eternal instant that I was a quail rocketing over a marsh with a shotgun banging at my tail, and then I wound up flat on my puss amidst the remains of something or other which I had been thinking looked very fragile, and now was proved to be just that. There was a dull, tinkly, horrifying thud off to my right. I lay there, watching six months' wages vanish with my mind's eye, and wondering if I'd be fired in addition to having to pay for the 44-N.

"—Wire," finishes Garvin, somewhat belatedly.

Ed Hornigold picked me up and under cover of pretending to brush me off gave me a hearty belt in the belly, quick and short so the Doc wouldn't see him. "You blubber-brained gnat-head," he growled, which was unkind, since anybody will occasionally trip over a wire. I'll bet James Garvin himself did it at times.

Well, we picked up the 44-N, which had fallen onto a mess of prickly metal balls and spikey objects, several of which were emitting green flashes and humming irritably. We moved it over to the clear space by the wall, and Doc Garvin turned off the humming flashes and tinkered a minute, then said kindly, "No harm done here, gentlemen. Let's look at my trivideo set."

By then I was thinking of it as *my* set, of course, since I almost certainly would have to purchase it to appease my employers; and I was wondering what my wife would do for new dresses during the next year while we were living on half-pay, and more especially what she would be saying to me about it from then on. I turned 44-N around so we could see the giant screen, and after plugging it into an outlet I snapped on the sound and picture controls before Ed could suggest that we inspect the innards. There was a bare possibility that

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nothing had happened to the thing, and I wanted to find out quite soon, before I perspired all my breakfast orange juice away through my scared and gaping pores.

Ed was officiously trying to peer behind the set, to see if there were any tubes and wires hanging out in mortal agony I guess, and Doc Garvin was standing beside me with his hand on my shoulder. He was emanating good will and forgiveness, and I was grateful. The Doc was a sort of a nice Joe, you know, considering that he had done everything, been everywhere, and knew everything there was to be known, and with it all was only about thirty-five years old. You might have expected him to be puffed up as a frog with importance, but no.

"There seems to be—" began Ed from the rear of the set.

"Shut up. Something's coming."

The screen was all fluttery with unresolved patterns, and it looked like the old two-dimensional screens used to look when they were getting test patterns. It was a kind of silver-gray shade. I didn't like the looks of it.

I turned up the volume control, to drown out Ed's bleating, and got a very fine sound, if you enjoy hearing thirteen flutes out of tune playing in a barrel.

"Hmm," said our host.

"Hmm," I repeated brightly. I clicked it off and we turned the 44-N around and all three of us bent over and gaped inside.

"Looks okay to me," said Ed grudgingly.

Well, Ed has the education and the brains, and he can call every atom in a set by its full name, but me, I got the know-how. I'm on the more dismal side of forty, and have been working with these things and their granddads since I was kneehigh to a bean sprout. I can feel it when there's something haywire with a set.

I PUT ON my gloves and fiddled with this and that, and pushed an electrode to see if it was as loose as it looked, and checked the receptors, and cased the rest of the stuff briskly, and it looked a little better; so I turned her around again and snapped her on.

First the volume blatted out like a siren. I turned it low. The screen grew the gray-silver sheen, then deepened to purplish and instead of two-dimensions we were looking into it deeply, like you should into any respectable trivideo set. The colors began to play around, very agile and lissome. "Beautiful!" said Doc Garvin heartily, and I had to agree with him, even though the weird compositions worried me. I had never seen a shaft of mauve hue dance intricately with half a dozen globules of plaid before. It was a very eye-widening experience. "A perfect symphony of color," our scientist went on. "What is it? A new development in jazz musicolor? Wonderful!"

"It looks like jazz, all right," I said.

"If it is," said Ed nastily, "where's the music?"

"You got me."

"Watch the screen," I told Garvin. "I'll tinker with things. Maybe we can fix the old girl up without taking her back to the plant."

"I hope so," nodded the Doc. "There's a program of astronomy tonight I don't want to miss. You know," he went on, as I crouched down behind the half-turned set and started to ponder over the alumisteel guts of 44-N, "our expedition will be starting in just eight days now. Not much time left to amuse myself!"

"You going to Luna again, or what?"

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"Great heavens, man, haven't you heard of the Martian Project?" he spluttered.

I shrugged. "I been pretty busy."

"Why, the screens and circuits have been full of it for months! It's what I've been planning all my life: the first flight to Mars, man! I'm taking—"

I had to chuckle then. It had seemed to me that this VIJ was the sort you could pull a joke on, and he was. He stopped, coughed, turned pink, and laughed like hell. "I didn't think anybody in America could have escaped the publicity," he said. "Guess I was fairly cocky about it, eh? No kidding, though, it's just eight days off, and that's why I want this trivideo set now. I have to relax. I'm as tense as an E-string."

"Why do you want it here in your lab?" asked Ed.

"I've got some things to wind up. A few calculations, and then there's Herman there," he pointed to the partially dismantled robot, "who has to be assembled in time to go with me."

"So you're going to relax with the three-di screen, while putting together a robot and calculating a trip to Mars. Ah," said I, noodling with some dials in the back, "ah, Doc, what are you planning to do with your free hand?"

He started to laugh, and then he broke it off and yipped, "It's resolving! It's going to clear up, I think!"

I craned my neck around to see into the screen. The colors were smoothing out. I snaked around on my knees and hunkered in front of it, Ed looking over one shoulder and Doc Garvin over the other. The screen cleared and there was the tridimensional picture.

Well, I can't describe it for you with any great beauty of phrase. I'm not equipped to reproduce that amazing color, that perfection of form, in rolling sonorous words. But bear with me, and I'll try.

It was a little glade in a woodland. The trees in the background were all shades of green and red—yes, red, and I don't mean autumn leaves either. Their boles were scarlet, vermilion, pink, rust, salmon, claret . . . while the green trees faded from emerald to olive, from cobalt to citrine. Funny thing, you'd imagine those different tints would clash. Not a bit of it. There were superbly harmonious. Honest to John.

The ground looked soft and cool. It didn't have regular grass on it, so far as I could tell. It just looked smooth and restful, like a great big resilient mattress of light blue-green.

What we could see of the sky was regulation deep blue.

Down through the center of the pic meandered a stream of golden liquid, clear and laughing with sunglints on its ripples. It was like no water you ever saw. It looked—well, it looked like the celebrated combination of milk and honey, heavy on the bee-juice.

There wasn't a sign of life from top to bottom and side to side. Just the glade, the stream, the queer beautiful colors.

We all waited expectantly for a minute. Nothing happened.

"That's odd," said Doc Garvin. "What can it be?"

"It's a pip of a set, whatever it's meant to be. Try the sound again, Bill. Maybe there's some narration going on," said Ed.

I GOT THE same awful noises when I turned up the volume knob. "No good," I said. Then I took the current list of programs out of my hip pocket and thumbed down till I hit ten A.M. There was a kiddies' program, a home cookery hour, chamber

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music, a couple of detergent operas including my wife's favorite, Mary's Other Life, which is all about this reincarnated babe who—well, never mind; there was a lecture on supersonic flights, and a couple of other varied items. I read their titles aloud to the other two. Garvin rubbed his strong chin thoughtfully.

"This can't possibly be any of them. Is that absolutely all that's being telecast now?"

"Including the Scandinavian. That's the works."

We all looked at the screen again. "Holy Toledo," said Ed doubtfully. "What have we got, then?"

Garvin went back and took a look at the entrails of old 44-N. Then he squinted thoughtfully—we were all extremely thoughtful at that point—and he lit a pipe, and then he scowled at the machine or whatever it was on which I had tossed the trivideo set in my recent tumble. "By the gods," he said. "By Pan and Ormazd and Ganymede. By all of 'em. I have an idea."

"That's more than I have," said I.

"All you have," said Ed, "is big flat feet and no sense."

"Listen, gentlemen," said Garvin, puffing out smoke like an old-fashioned chimney, "for decades we've been trying to perfect a receiving set that will reproduce waves of light which are not being broadcast, not being sent at all in the usual sense. . . ."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean a set that will show what's happening at another point without that point having a sending apparatus. A video screen that will catch waves untouched by the mechanisms of man, d'you see? In other words, a receptor for ordinary light waves that are actually simon-pure light waves, not photographed—not bent—not even seen, maybe—by anybody. A vizi-phone without wires, a television without a broadcasting station, a photographic print without a camera. Plainly, gentlemen, a machine to pick up what's going on anywhere on earth. *Anywhere.* Train it on the North Pole, see the North Pole. Ditto the South Sea islands. No sending set, no wires, nothing up the sleeves, just one set in one place to send its fingers of atomic sensitivity throughout the world to pick up what's transpiring anyplace you want to see."

"I get you," I said. "It's quite a dream."

"I think we're looking at that dream now," said Doc Garvin. "I think you've stumbled—literally!—on the fulfillment of that dream. Somehow you jumbled the internal workings of your 44-N into a new pattern, and now it's picking up a scene from God knows where, and showing us a forest glade that may be a hundred miles from the nearest trivideo station."

"Pretty far-fetched," grunted Ed dubiously.

"Well, which of the scheduled programs do *you* think this is?" I asked him. "By gosh, I think Doc—I mean Doctor Garvin—is right."

As one man we whipped around to the back of the set. "Don't touch anything again," warned the scientist. "We can't take chances yet. Wait a minute." He hared away and came back with a fistful of slim metallic tools like dentist's mirrors on stalks. "We can inspect all the mechanism with these."

Ed checked the tubes, the Doc brooded over this and that, while I shoved my skull way into the thing and with my semi-periscopic mirror checked up on keys, dials, circuits and speaker parts which I hadn't been able to see plainly before. And when I found the part we were all looking for, a very queer little chill began to trot up and down my spine, like a

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drunken mouse with feet of ice....

In the section devoted to depth perception devices, there was a lean dull-surfaced tube of metal alloy. Ordinarily it should have run straight up from its base to a point just below an electrolytic cell. But when I dropped the set onto Doc Garvin's machinery, something had socked the tube and bent it into a slightly angular position. Just below and just above the bend, the dull alloy had developed a shine on its surface. And in the middle of the bend—

The tube wasn't there.

IT WASN'T broken in half. There weren't any jagged edges. The metal simply faded, yes, *faded* into nothingness. There was an infinitesimal distance where you could see it shimmering if you squinted hard, and then it was gone. A fraction of an inch later it shimmered into being again, then became a tube once more.

I husked once or twice and said, "I found it."

They looked at it with their own mirrors. "Holy Toledo," said Ed Hornigold. "Aha!" chimed in the Doc.

"What is it?"

"The culprit. Conversely, the splendid little accident."

"Tell me I need glasses," I said. "Tell me it's intact."

"No indeed. It really disappears. It goes, unless all my degrees mean nothing, unless my researches count for nought, it goes into another dimension. And there it manages to pick up the images we just saw on the screen. How, why, where—Lord knows!"

"You mean that all those trees and things are in another dimension?"

"Well, perhaps not. Probably not. But the center of that tube *is*, and somehow that makes possible the transmission, without sending apparatus, of the images."

Carefully turning old 44-N so that her back was against the wall, in case, as Ed said, I should happen to fall on it again, we went and got chairs and sat down before the screen.

And we sat there the whole blessed day, till Ed jumped and looked at his watch and said, "Hey! It's four-thirty!"

"Bill," said the Doc (by that time we were calling each other Bill and Ed and Jim), "I'll call your boss. I'm going to get a vacation with pay for you two, and in the seven days I have left we're going to do some mighty careful toying with this set. You were in on the beginning of it, and you deserve to stick it through with me." He rang my chief on the viziphone, and five minutes later Ed and I had instructions to help Doctor Garvin in whatever he desired, and report back to the office when we were through, whether it was a week or a month.... Garvin could do things like that. He was really a VIJ.

"Go home and get a good night's rest," he told us, shaking our hands heartily. "Tomorrow we'll tinker."

I hated to leave. That may sound funny. There we'd been sitting in front of that picture for six hours and more, and it hadn't changed at all, except that what we could see of the sky had grown to a darker blue. No living creature had romped onto the scene. Not even a wind had stirred the multicolored leaves of the variegated trees. But we hated to leave, both Ed and me. There was so much peace in the scene. So much comfortable beauty. We could have starved without noticing it, I think, if we could just have watched that strange picture....

I told my wife about it. She said it sounded pretty dopey. I ate supper and played with my kids, and went to bed early.

About two-thirty in the morning my phone rang. I picked it up—we don't

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have a viziphone in our bedroom, of course—and said groggily, "Whassat? Huh?"

"Bill," Garvin's big voice busted out from the earpiece, "get over here on the double!"

"What happened? She blow up on us?" I was wide awake. I'd been dreaming about that glade in the odd forest. If I'd lost it—

"No, no. It's unchanged. I mean it's changed, but—oh, get over here and see for yourself!" He hung up.

I shot into my clothes, left a note for the wife with Garvin's number on it, and hurtled my runabout across town and into the South Einsteinville suburbs. I rang the door chimes and Herman the robot opened the portal.

"Who put you together?" I gasped, starting back from the gaze of those eyes.

"Doctor Garvin reassembled me this evening, while watching his new trivideo set," articulated Herman. "Will you step in? I take it you are Bill. Ed arrived three minutes forty seconds ago."

I stepped in. Herman, clanking a trifle—I guess the Doc had done a kind of hasty, preoccupied job on him—switched down the collapsible stairs. I dashed up them and the robot followed.

There was Doc Garvin, with Ed beside him, hunched before the 44-N. I went over. "What's happened?"

They both gestured at the screen without speaking.

IT WAS NIGHT in the glade. The colors were subdued and subtly changed, the waters (or more properly liquids, I guess) of the stream were dark with gleaming highlights, and the boles and leaves of the trees shone in the silvery light of two moons.

Two moons?

"Gaaah," I said.

"Exactly. I watched twilight come on, the stars come out, and then *they* appeared. I was damn near petrified. Here, take a chair." I did so. "Does it mean anything to you, Bill?"

"It is another dimension, eh?"

"No, but another world. I think we all realized it, subconsciously, this afternoon," he said slowly. "We sat here enthralled by the unearthly beauty of the place, and knew that it could not possibly be a glade on Terra."

"Where is it?" I asked him, staring with all my eye muscles at the twin moons.

"Mars."

I was speechless. Somehow another dimension would have surprised me less. Mars seems so far away....

"The moons are Deimos and Phobus, of course. In the—"

He never finished. I clamped down on his arm with one hand, while with the other I pointed shakily. "Look there," I whispered. "Under that tree on the left. Just above the bend of the stream."

"What is it?" hissed Ed

"Ssh," said the Doc. We were all silent. I suppose we thought the critter would hear us.

After a while it scuttled from one tree to the next. It moved like a man, except it was nervous-looking, and crouched over. It reminded me of something, but I couldn't think what.

"If it would only come into the moonlight," whispered Doc.

It did. Then I knew what it reminded me of.

My oldest boy has a book of cartoons at home. It's a kind of history of comics, from the early part of the century right up to 1975. In the first section there are some pictures by a mighty fine and funny artist, of a little meek egg named Milquetoast. He's always getting pushed around. He never hits back, except in his mind. He's a shellfish without a shell. Quite

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a character.

This Martian reminded me of Milquetoast.

We couldn't tell how big he was, naturally, because we didn't have any scale to judge by. We didn't know but what those trees were seven feet high, or maybe seven hundred. But somehow he looked about five foot five. He wore a kilt of dark red cloth. His legs beneath it were spindly and knock-kneed. His belly was a plump little ball, his chest might as well not have been there at all, his arms were crooked and as the poet says, the muscles in his scrawny arms were just like rubber bands. His face was the face of a little guy who has spent a lifetime being shoved around. His chin was retarded and hairless, his eyes looked watery. He was one miserable specimen. Indeed he was.

"This is a Martian?" gasped Ed incredulously.

"One of them guys we're always thinking will invade us?" I added.

Doc Garvin spluttered and laughed. "This is—this is the damndest thing I ever saw," he said. "There is about the lousiest-looking piece of humanity I ever laid eye on, really a dreg if ever there was a dreg. And it's on Mars! It's human, no matter how low it's sunk, and it's on *Mars*!"

We whooped and laughed with him. Honest, it was uproarious. We sat there the rest of the night, after the critter had scurried back into his forest after a surreptitious gulp from the stream, and every so often one of us would start to giggle again. I think I even heard a sympathetic chuckle from Herman the robot.

AT SEVEN we had breakfast. By then the Martian night was ending too. The moons had gone and the trees were turning gilt with sun. You could almost hear the Martian birds chirping, if there were any. We ate off paper plates without budging from our seats. Garvin put out theories as to how come this human being on another planet, Ed demolished them, I put in my nickel's worth, and we had us a swell time. It all ended up that we didn't know why, how, or who, but we got quite a boot out of just guessing.

All that day we watched the set, and nothing happened. We didn't care. It was enough that we'd seen a Martian, and could continue to breathe in the marvelous scenery in which he lived.

"What do you suppose he's scared of?" asked Ed one time.

"Lord knows. Perhaps there are giant animals there that prey on his kind. Maybe he's a dawn man, or maybe he's a last remnant of a once-proud race of conquerors. Maybe—hell's fire! Maybe my expedition isn't the first from earth! Maybe back in the days of Atlantis they had atomic power, rockets, all that; maybe they sent men to Mars, and that poor fish is the last of their descendants."

"Could be," I said. "I wonder what he's afraid of?"

We kept wondering that all day. That night we notified our wives we'd be out till further notice (my spouse raised the devil), and took turns watching while the others slept. Nothing happened. Next day we talked some about trying to change the focal point of our miraculous set's waves. The discussion kind of petered out. I think we were all scared to tamper with it, for fear of knocking it out of whack.

Doc Garvin began to talk a lot about his nearing journey to Mars. Naturally Ed and I were pretty envious. We even asked, half-heartedly, if we could go along; but the crew was full and Doc reluctantly shook his head. I believe he'd have taken us if he could have figured a good excuse,

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because the three of us were good friends by then.

Well, it got to be just two days till the flight. There hadn't been a minute in those long days and nights when one or another hadn't been glued to the screen of old 44-N. No further manifestations of life had shown up.

It was about five in the afternoon. Herman and I were playing chess and Ed was asleep. Garvin was shaving in front of the screen. First thing I knew he let out a yell that would have shattered the eardrums of a weaker man. I dropped my queen and covered the room in three bounces. "What is it?"

He didn't answer. He didn't have to. I saw for myself.

A woman had come into the glade. She was crossing it as I first looked at the screen. Right in the center she stopped and sat down cross-legged on the soft-looking ground. She had a little metal container like a basket slung over her arm, and now she proceeded to open it and take out things which may have been items of food. I never knew, because I never once glanced at them. My eyes were leaning out on my cheeks and so far as I was concerned the world had just vanished around me, leaving nothing but this Martian dame. Let me try to tell you why.

First there was her face. Well, anyway, that's what I first saw. It wasn't any more important than the rest of her, but I'll start with it.

It was topped with hair like sunrays spun on a magic loom. There were enormous blue eyes, set just right: not too far apart, not too close together, under a forehead just the proper height. There was a nose that was what all noses have been trying to be since they first sprouted. There were lips... well, if anybody had tried to tell me there was a flaw in those lips, I'd have strangled him. With one hand.

It was a perfect face. I don't care what your preference is, whether it's for plump-faced blondes or narrow-jawed brunettes, or whatever; this face would have struck you as just exactly what Nature had in mind in the first place. No argument about it, this doll had the finest face anybody ever laid glim on.

Gradually, like a kid with an ice cream sundae, I let my blazing gaze ooze down over the rest of her.

No, I won't go into detail. A man cannot go into detail over perfection even if he knows all the words there are, which I don't. It boils down to this—*wow!*

You know this show that's been running on Broadway for twenty-seven years, in which there is a song about a girl, of which one line goes: And she's broad where a broad should be broad....

Exactly.

SHE WAS dressed in something or other, very pretty I suppose, with short skirt and softly tailored this and that, but if I had to identify a stitch of that costume today I couldn't do it. I was occupied in gaping at her, not her adornments.

Lord knows how long the four of us—Herman was intrigued too—were paralyzed in front of that screen. Maybe hours. Anyhow, we none of us budged an inch until the Martian female gathered up whatever it was she had taken out of the container, put it back, stood up and strolled away, followed by three long gusty sighs and a metallic wheeze from Herman.

There was a long, long silence.

"Jee-hosaphat!" Ed said finally, stretching his cramped muscles. "Did I see it, or was I asleep?"

"Do you know what occurs to me, gentlemen?" asked Doc Garvin then. "That—terrific—that gorgeous—*that*

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is the female of the species of which we saw a male some nights ago."

"My stars and rockets," I said intellectually.

We traded inane exclamations for a while, and then we noticed a movement among the trees. Instantly we were all agog as ever. And what should come skittering out but one of those damn little Milquetoast Martian men, looking over his shoulder and hustling to beat hell!

"Maybe we'll see what he's afraid of now," Ed grunted. "It must be on his heels."

It was.

It was another woman, a redhead this time, different but just as radiantly magnificent as the blonde; she was c o m i n g a l o n g unconcernedly, whistling, from the way her lovely mouth was puckered; and the man was running from her!

"He's not only nerve-ridden, he's nuts!" hissed Garvin.

"Amen," said I.

The girl saw the little critter just as he was leaping across the stream. She made a kind of cute disgusted face, and then smiled and shook her head, like you do at a child. We could have taken oath right then that she wouldn't have hurt the poor fish. It was just that he was afraid of everything, absolutely everything, even her.

We knew it. Sure, it was guessing, but when we saw that flawless face, and the sweet sort of pitying smile, we knew she was good clear through.

"It can't be a separate race," Doc was muttering in his half-shaved beard.

"You mean the man and the woman are the same race?"

"Oh, yes, that's obvious. Female dominant. Exceedingly. But so wonderfully!" He grinned. "What I meant was that Mars just couldn't have produced a human race corresponding so closely to Terra's. It must be the result of previous space flight, maybe eons back in dusty time.... Look. They're obviously mammalian."

"Oh, I agree with that," said Ed. "She's a spiced-up version of Terrestrial Woman. All the good physical traits perfected, all the bad obviously bred out. And that man...glory! What a mate for her!"

The redhead had been looking around sort of furtively. Now she opened her metal basket-container—they all seemed to carry them—and took out a rolled-up piece of paper, parchment, thin leather, or something of the sort. She unrolled it and held it at arms' length, and her big eyes got dreamy and lazy-looking. We couldn't see what was on the thing.

"I wonder what she's holding?" I asked inanely.

"Is she holding something?" said Ed hazily. "I hadn't noticed. You know, she's just what every man has been conjuring up in his best dreams for centuries. She's what these air-brush artists are trying to draw in the sleek sophisticated magazines. She's—"

He maundered on. Me, I was trying to get a look at what she was holding. I'm a lot older than Ed is, anyway, and more settled in my emotions, I guess.

Just then she turned around. She was whirling on her toes in an ecstasy of admiration for the picture. It *was* a picture. A picture of a big-chested, handsome, cocky-looking guy in a trench coat. A photograph.

A photograph of the American movie star, Errol Twofist!

I COULD have dropped right down through the floor with amazement. So could the Doc, I guess, because he made a noise like a perishing flounder. Ed was still admiring the tilt of her ears, or something.

"Do-do-do-do you know what that means?" bubbled Garvin.

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"Sure. We were wrong about it being Mars. It's someplace on Earth."

"With the two moons?"

"Then it's in a dimension right next door to us, and they can reach through and photograph us." I was stubborn.

"Idiot!" said the Doc furiously. "Don't you suppose I've checked the position of the constellations? It's Mars all right. Now either they are the pioneers of space flight, who landed on Mars from Earth within two years at the outside—that's a *recent* photo—in a secret rocket, or else they have developed science to an extent where they can take pictures of things here on Terra as small as a human being."

He wiped a streaming forehead. Herman handed him another handkerchief solicitously. He went on. "The first theory's impossible. My ship is absolutely the first. There could not by any stretch of imagination have been a previous one. Hell, no, not in this civilization anyhow! So it means that they can penetrate space with their machines and photograph—maybe even listen to us! They must be Atlanteans, or Lemurians, or Moovians, or—anyway, they must have once originated on Terra; and grown to a titanically intelligent peak, and then gone off for some reason to Mars. How's that for a theory?"

"I don't know about theories, Doc," I said. "I guess if you figure it that way, it's so. All I know is that these Martian dolls, who look just about perfect to my old eyes, carry around pin-up pictures, and those pictures are of Earth men. Brother!" I said. "What a situation! And you're going up there in a few hours!"

"Brother!" repeated Doc Garvin softly. "Oh, brother!"

The radiant redhead moved slowly out of the screen's limits, still gazing like a dreamy calf at good old Errol Twofist.

"Doc," said Ed, waking up from his revery, "if you don't find me a place on that jet job of yours, I'll stow away. I'll hang onto a fin. I'll dress up like Herman and clank aboard."

"I'll take you, Ed," said the scientist. "I'll take Bill too, if he'll come."

"Well," I said, "I got my wife and kids. I'm forty-two. I don't guess I'm a pin-up type myself, even to babes who've been living with jerks like little Jojo Milquetoast. I better hadn't go. But I'd sure like you to take Ed along. His wife wouldn't miss him, I bet."

I didn't say that mean-like, you understand. I really felt that Ed should go, and that his wife should let him. It was something about these Mars gals that made me feel that way, all noble, good, generous, kind, loving, splendid.... It worked on us all the same way. Like Garvin offering to take us. He didn't have a call to do that, really. We were just a couple of trivideo mechanics. But he wanted to share this beauty with us. He liked us. We liked him. We all liked everything. I guess true beauty does that to a guy.

Get me! A philosopher!

We started to talk about what Doc and Ed would do up on Mars.

"Of course, there's eugenics, genetics, biology," said the adventuring scientist. "We may find that we can't breed with these Martians. You see, I could be wrong about them being from here originally. Maybe Nature *did* work in the same lines on both planets. I can't say. But maybe, just maybe, we won't be able to beget children from these unions."

There wasn't any question but what there'd be unions.

"So what?" said Ed rudely. "Who wants a lot of kids cluttering up the glade when you can be alone with one

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of *them?"*

Doc didn't say anything, but his eyes agreed with Ed.

WELL, TIME passed and it was the launching day, and we all said fond farewells, and Ed and the Doc took off in their rocket, with a couple of hundred young fellows for crew, and Herman the robot.

Following Doc Garvin's instructions, I then called in a lot of top brains of the country and showed them old 44-N, and explained what had happened.

For a month there was chaos. The whole world heard about our little window on Mars. Wheels turned, cogs meshed, things churned like crazy.

At the end of the month Garvin's house was full of guards, scientists, and television equipment. A new channel was inaugurated and twenty-four hours a day now you can flip to that channel and see a tri-di pic of our 44-N, flashing out the colorful, marvelous glade of the Martian woodland.

About six months after they blasted off, someone who was watching his screen with an eagle eye caught a flash of Garvin's lads come zipping through the atmosphere in their silver streak. Some time later a whole covey of Martian girls went tearing across the screen, screeching and hollering and grinning from ear to lovely ear. It didn't take a giant intellect to guess that the news had reached them of a lot of their pin-up boys actually landing on Mars.

Some weeks later I was sitting at home watching the new channel. It was almost as though I was back in Doc's lab, with him and Ed beside me and Herman chinking in the background. I was getting drowsy when all of a sudden who should come strolling into the glade but good old Doc Garvin himself, not a pin-up snapshot! He looked around carefully, sort of laughed to himself, turned toward me and waved an arm and winked. I bet he recognized the place. He must have been looking for it.

On one arm was hanging a Martian gal with the finest equipment you ever laid orb on. She was staring up at Doc in that calfy way they used to look at their space-photos of Errol Twofist. It looked like she wanted to kiss him. He grinned, pointed straight at me, and led her offstage left. I think he knew I'd be watching the set. I know that wink and grin was for me.

Well, that's about all of the story, except for the menace part. I been thinking hard. I'm not used to it, but I forced myself.

What I'm thinking is, what about the future of mankind now?

All over the world they're knocking together spaceships on Garvin's plans. Big ones, medium ones, ships you could put a city block into and lose it, and even little homemade ones built by the crackpots. All over Terra guys are staring at their trivideo sets with one eye and reading plans of rockets with the other.

Within ten years every able-bodied fellow is going to be on Mars, on his way to Mars, or just getting ready to take off for Mars. And the way I look at it is, there aren't going to be many women going along. A, there isn't any incentive for them to go there like there is for the men. Those Martian men are a mess. B, most of our women are so sore at their husbands and boy friends over the Martian business that they'll stay home for spite. And C, there is that old question about Why take a ham sandwich to a banquet?

NOW WHEN they all get up there, there just isn't going to be any reason to come home. It's the land of

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milk and honey for sure, heaven on Mars. So pretty soon what's left of the human race on Earth? A million old men and kids, and gosh knows how many million disgruntled, angry, embittered women, watching a red star in the night sky and swearing very unladylike.

Well, if this isn't a menacing situation, what is? Earth is going to be depopulated shortly, maybe within my own lifetime. Mars is going to be overrun with our fellows, all with radiant superhuman gals clinging to them. Even if there's only one girl for every ten men eventually up there, that won't matter. There won't be fights. The looks of the place just make you love everybody too much for that. They'll share amiably, I'll bet.

And what if the two races can't breed? One generation and we're *done*. And I haven't seen a sign of a kid yet on my screen, although Garvin's bunch have been there for almost a year.

Cooler heads will prevail, you say. Pal, there just aren't any cool heads left in the world!

Oh, of course, I'm not going. I got a wife, some pretty nice kids, and I'm forty-three going on four. I'm set in my ways. You couldn't get me to Mars. Some of the guys like me, they'll stay. And we'll have us a lonely little colony on a big lonesome world.

It's not sour grapes on my part, mind you. I could go up and grab me one of those lovelies like Garvin and Ed and the rest. They don't just go for the hairy-chested handsome-brute type. I've seen them walking through the glade with spacemen who looked like missing links. No kidding! Any Earth man has a chance. Even me...

No, I won't go. One of my pals has a ship about built, over at Falconhawk Aircraft. He keeps telling me I ought to go along with him. But I wouldn't leave the wife.

On the other hand, she's just as bad these days as the rest of the women, always nagging, nagging, pestering about why do I spend so much time looking at red and green trees, what do I see in those hussies, and so on. A guy gets almighty sick of hearing that day in and day out.

Of course I wouldn't desert the kids. They're growing up, be getting jobs soon, they could look after themselves, but I couldn't just walk out on them, like everybody else is doing.

No, I'm too stodgy and set in my rut to go shooting through space with my tongue lolling out, in pursuit of some foreign-planet dame. I like to think I got better sense.

On the other hand....

THE END

"SLAVE STATION"

★ **By Leslie Phelps** ★

SCIENTISTS have to refer more and more to literary allusions and homy down-to-earth similes to describe some of their devices. One of the most picturesque of recent times is the "slave station". Essentially this is an automatic mechanism for relaying a radio or television signal from one area to another without human interference.

It is an extremely important device these days, with industry trying to blanket the nation completely with television waves. Since these waves only travel over lines of sight, a matter of less than a hundred and fifty miles, it is obviously impractical to have the necessary television stations to cover that amount of space. The answer is found in these small, low-powered stations which act as "slaves" to the big ones, faithfully reproducing ev-

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erything gobbled up by them, making it possible for Joe Blow in Terra Del Fuego, Arkansas, to sit by his set and watch the ball game!

These slaves stations pick up a very narrow highly directional beam from their "masters", amplify and then re-broadcast it to the surrounding regions. Also they send out a narrow beam to a "slave's slave",—another station to cover still more area.

The slave stations, in conjunction with coaxial cables, are converting the United States into a completely blanketed nation, as thoroughly steeped in television waves as it is in radio waves. It will be another five years before the program is complete, but certainly not much longer.

The brains are working too on trans-oceanic television transmission too. The answer hasn't quite been found, but undoubtedly it will resolve itself in one or more of three ways.

First there is the possibility of laying an oceanic coaxial cable. This seems unfeasible for lots of technical reasons—though it may be resorted to.

Secondly, the idea of spaced relays of airplanes hovering over the ocean at definite intervals and picking up and re-broadcasting like the "slave" stations, may be used. This too doesn't seem to be the best bet.

A variation of this is the third method, which would employ ships instead of planes. Unquestionably this method is the most promising even though it would call for a large number of vessels. These could be small, with very high towers, and they might even be remotely controlled such as the Coast Guard's ship-lighthouses.

Whatever the means, it is certainly going to be a necessity in the foreseeable future. Europe is beginning to revive and slowly television is getting on its shaky knees on the continent of its birth. Eventually it will be a network matter there, too, and of course such a net should be integrate with our own, the world's greatest. Truly, then the world will be at one's fingertips!

★ ★ ★

FANTASY OF DREAMING

★ By John Weston ★

THERE ARE certain psychological experiences common to all. The most famous of these perhaps is the one where you imagine that you've undergone an experience before. You see some event, some incident, and momentarily you have the illusion that you're actually re-living a previous experience. The feeling lasts for an instant and then it's gone. Everyone has undergone this commonplace but always startling, experience.

On a higher level, but just as commonplace, is the experience of re-living, through memory, a book, a play, a movie or an incident. All of us can hark back to our youth, certain events which partook of the nature of a dream. Who hasn't spent time with a particular book on a hot summer afternoon, half-drowsy, yet fully alert to the characterizations of the novel, living in their shadow-world more real at the moment than the living we were doing? The novels of Burroughs, famous volumes like "Robinson Crusoe" or "Treasure Island", are the perfect example of the adolescent or semi-adolescent dreaming which at the time was so captivating. One didn't *read* the novels; one entered into their world. We were a part of the hero or heroine so realistically that reality itself paled into nothing beside the fierce events which captured us.

A lot of people are going to be aware of this peculiar psychological action when they see the motion picture film "Treasure Island". The story is strictly one of blood and thunder, fierce action and devilish plotting and counter-plotting. But it is one of the world's great adventure stories, perfectly told. The makers of the film succeeded in capturing this attitude and transfering it without change to the screen. The film *is* the book; minor discrepancies do not alter that fact. The mental creatures we visualized when we read the book, are brought into perfect focus in the film. The island and the ship and the Inn, *Admiral Benbow*, are exactly as our minds saw them.

You'll find when you see the film that a peculiar chemistry of emotion takes place. You won't be twenty or thirty or forty or fifty when you see it. Instead you'll open your mouth with amazement, then settle back and to all intents and purposes you'll be as old as you were when you read captivating Jim Hawkins' story. The years vanish and the scene vanishes, and you are spending a quite sleepy summer afternoon with Long John Silver aboard the *Hispanola*.

Fantasy and fact blend into one. How psychologists explain this strange effect we don't know. It doesn't occur very often, but when it does it leaves a profound mark. And too rarely are we affected by these dream-fantasies.

If you want to vanish from this world for two hours or so, make a point of seeing Treasure Island—you won't believe you're in the twentieth century—for that time at least...

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WHO SLEEPS with the ANGELS . . .

He lay back on the couch and relaxed while the angels danced around him; it seemed like a very pleasant dream

By Frances M. Deegan

Insurance was a big business on Mars, but nobody had ever sold a policy to the Angels—they were too busy being human . . .

SIX ANGELS sat around Glenn Scott's bed. They were fascinated by his facial contortions and the odd snoring noises that whistled and popped out of his writhing mouth.

Glenn was struggling with an unpleasant dream in which Fillmore Sachs, Managing Director of The

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Great Martian Insurance Association, had just fired him. In spite of the fact that he was the star salesman for the Association, and brought in more business for the Life, Health and Accident Departments than any other two salesmen combined, he was about to be shipped back to Earth with other undesirable colonists.

The reason for his dream disgrace was not clear, but everybody seemed to be laughing at him contemptuously. Even Miss Jersey Prim, that lush bit of Earthly femininity who had promised to be his bride, had turned against him. She was laughing heartlessly as she allowed herself to be led away by none other than Oswald U. Sparks, dapper Agency Manager for Boyd's-on-Mars, and Glenn's most bitter competitor. This was unbearable, even in a dream.

A long groaning snore ended in a loud pop and Glenn was awake. His mouth was fuzzy and his eyes were blurred, but he saw the Angels. Their small round faces were staring at him with big eyes, their tiny mouths open expectantly.

"Uh!" Glenn said sheepishly. "Wha' time's it?"

He was answered by a chorus of light, tinkling voices, all babbling gayly about last night's party. He sat up and they fluttered about the room in a very ecstasy of delight, because he was awake and aware of them once more. They adored him. Their spangled wings and brightly decorated bodies made a swirling rainbow about the bed. Glenn made a grab at the one wearing his watch. It happened to be a female and she squealed joyously like a little silver flute as he pulled her down on the bed and retrieved the watch. Her membranous wings caressed him gently.

He pushed her away with a howl of outrage when he saw the time. "It's high sun already! I told you to wake me at low sun, at first morning. Now I'm late. Get out of the way, this is business."

They perched on the furniture and sang at him sweetly all the time he was rushing about trying to collect his scattered wits and clothes. Their silvery voices rippled in natural harmony like the pure voices of children.

"Sing you sinners," Glenn scolded them. "That's all you're good for. You can't even cook, and I'm famished. Get off my pants—shoo!"

They all got into bed, folded their wings, and sang plaintively against his pretended anger, and ended the refrain with innocent laughter. They were no more capable of grief than the seraphim of ancient Earth legends. *

THE SIX Angels accompanied Glenn to the huge Circle Cafe where he bought them ice cream at the round bar, drank black coffee hastily, and escaped into the thin, dry sunlight of the Martian noon. His three-wheeled utility scooter cut through the slow moving crowds on the broad streets of Alexandria-on-Mars, but he held it down to the legal speed limit. He was so late now that speed would not have helped, and by the time he reached the ground floor

*(*FOOTNOTE*): *Of the three races on the Main continent of Mars, the winged Angels were the most decorative and gay, and also the most useless. The languid Greenos were most nearly like Earthmen, and most useful in trade and business. But they, too, were virtually incapable of the passions of red blooded Earthmen, and they sang beautifully whenever the spirit moved them which was fairly often. Even the surly, hairy Slugs hummed monotonously as they labored in their self-imposed isolation. The blood base of all these Martians was magnesium (chlorophyll), whereas the blood base of Earthmen is iron (hemoglobin), which explained the difference in temperament according to the anthropologists. Many of the colonists and traders from Earth found this difference exasperating. They were frustrated in their attempts to deal with the Martians according to the social and economic standards of Earth.*

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garage of the office building he had collected his wits and was more nearly himself.

He breezed into the offices of The Great Martian Insurance Association with that jaunty air of a man with a guilty conscience, who hopes it isn't showing. The door to his small private office was closed, and inside he found his Greeno assistant, Murk, curled up in the armchair in a more than usually limp condition. Murk's head swung over one arm and was adorned with a large green swelling which showed up grotesquely among the fine sparse hairs.

As Glenn closed the door, Murk uncurled his pale seven foot length and slowly assumed a more human form. That is, he resembled a human who had been pulled through a knot hole and had emerged long, slim and streamlined and faintly tinged with green. When he had got himself untangled, he grinned amiably.

"What a party!" Glenn murmured. "What happened to you?"

"Murk," said Murk. By a strange coincidence, his wife's name was also Murk. He lifted a long six-fingered hand to touch the lump on his head tenderly.

"No!" Glenn was shocked at this unusual evidence of domestic violence. It was unheard of in a Martian household. He wondered uneasily what his own light of love might have to say about the previous night's revelry. Miss Jersey Prim was a good deal more fiery than the Martian women, and she was sure to have heard about it.

He did not have long to wonder. Miss Jersey Prim entered without knocking and closed the door firmly. Miss Prim was secretary to Fillmore Sachs, the boss of the GMI. She was not only intelligent and efficient, she was also beautiful according to Earth standards. One of those lively brunettes with dancing black eyes, vivid coloring, and a lush figure to match. Her anger only emphasized her glowing beauty.

"This is the end," she announced dramatically.

"The end of what?" Glenn inquired, and tried to imitate Murk's look of an amiable idiot, which the Martian put on whenever he was being bawled out. On Murk it was remarkably effective and served to deaden the barbed epithets hurled at him. But on Glenn it served no purpose whatever except to increase the fire flashing out of Miss Jersey Prim's angry eyes.

"Everything!" she declared sweepingly. "Everything's going to be changed."

"Tell me about it," Glenn invited innocently. "Sit down, dear, and tell me what it's all about."

Jersey remained standing uncompromisingly. "Last night I was with her." She shot an accusing finger at the seated Martian.

"Murk?" Glenn said.

"Murk," echoed Murk.

"Mrs. Murk! She and I talked over the whole thing."

"Oh," Glenn said noncommittally.

"Ow," Murk added reminiscently.

"This thing has got to stop right here and now," Jersey stated emphatically. "Either you fire Murk and take me on as your assistant, or else!"

"What are you saying." Glenn looked mildly horrified. "Darling, do you realize what you're suggesting? How could I take you on the road, among all sorts of uneducated—"

"The dangers of the road," Jersey declared, "are nowhere near as hazardous as you like to make out. The temptations are something else. If you ever mentioned those, your hair-raising tales of adventure might come closer to the facts. I suppose the way

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you and Murk entertained those visiting Greenos last night, right here in Alexandria, is a sample of the dangers you encounter on the road. Mrs. Murk is fed up with your carousing, and so am I."

THIS WAS sales resistance of a high order, and required a prompt counterattack. Glenn assumed an attitude of righteous indignation, which was not entirely unjustified. The picture of Jersey Prim stirring up a placid Martian woman, and inciting her to attack her husband was not only irritating, it was alarming.

"So it was you," he said bitterly, "who turned a sweet-tempered Martian wife into a shrew. She actually struck Murk. Do you realize what you've done? Do you want to upset the entire social system here on Mars? Do you want to see the females in revolt against the kindly males, and the whole place thrown into senseless confusion? Why, there's no telling where it would end. It might even affect the Angels and the Slugs. Think of it! All three races in turmoil, and business totally disrupted. That's treason!"

"You make me sick," Jersey declared flatly. "It's perfectly all right to keep the Martian women in ignorance while you and men like Murk play around with the light-minded Angels. But it's a high crime for me to tell the women the truth. You can't fool me into believing it's insurance business you're after."

"I think my record speaks for itself," Glenn retorted, but his knees were weakening under the unexpected violence of her attack. There was, he sensed, something more than met the eye in her fiery denunciation. He remembered his dream, and a horrid suspicion crossed his mind. He saw the dapper, predatory Agency Manager of Boyd's slyly alienating Jersey's affections while he was busy entertaining Martian prospects. "You talk," he said, "like Oswald U. Sparks. He always accuses me of unfair tactics every time I beat Boyd's on an insurance deal. Maybe you prefer his tactics when it comes to getting business or stealing affections."

"Maybe I do!" Jersey snapped. "At least he doesn't spend the greater part of his time playing with those useless Angels."

"Because they don't like him," Glenn crowed. "He doesn't know how to cultivate them."

"Why should he waste his time on them? They're not even good insurance risks."

Which was true enough. The Angels had a life of expectancy of only fifty years, whereas the Greenos and the Slugs had a life span of one hundred years according to the research analysts. But so far no one had been successful in interesting the Slugs in insurance of any kind. It was the Greenos who provided the most lucrative business, and who enjoyed the lavish entertainment Glenn was able to offer with the willing cooperation of the Angels.

"You talk more and more like old Oswald Sour-Grapes himself," Glenn remarked coldly. "Murk and I owe a good part of our success to the good will of the Angels, as you very well know. If you think I'm going to change my methods to please Oswald U. Sparks, you're very sadly mistaken."

"You're not going to marry Oswald Sparks!" Jersey stamped her foot angrily. "I'm the one you're supposed to please. I'm the one who wants you to reform."

Glenn shook his head firmly.

"You won't?"

"I won't!"

"You mean you absolutely refuse to let me work with you in place of Murk?"

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"I absolutely refuse to let you do anything so foolish and unwomanly. It's contrary to the Association policy, and I am sure Fillmore Sachs would never approve. But maybe," Glenn added, reckless with anger, "you could induce Boyd's to let you make a fool of yourself. Oswald is so desperate for business he might be willing to try anything."

The rosy glow faded from Jersey's cheeks and her eyes chilled. "Very well," she said stiffly.

SHE TURNED on her heel and departed so suddenly that Glenn's righteous indignation was deflated, and he was left with the foolish feeling of a man who has overshot the mark. This feeling was confirmed by Murk, who laid back his head with a preliminary tonal hum, and went into a weirdly beautiful lament which filled the soundproof office with regret and heartache. Some Earthmen found this Martian tendency to songful comment wildly distracting; but Glenn sat down at his desk and thumbed through the day's accumulation of reports and directives as if he were used to the tuneful accompaniment.

He was disturbed by something else, however. He had the uneasy conviction that he had just made a serious mistake, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. Jersey Prim was a hot-blooded, temperamental creature and that's why he loved her. But her arbitrary demands had been outrageous, ridiculous, and totally impossible. No doubt he should have referred the problem to Manager Sachs, and let him put his foot down. And that's what he would have done, if his own conscience had been clear. But the fact was that last night's party had somewhat exceeded the rules and regulations laid down by the Chamber of Commerce, and there was bound to be an official reprimand. And presenting the problem created by Jersey Prim would be like handing Fillmore Sachs more fuel to add to the flames of managerial wrath.

Glenn shuddered reminiscently. The Managing Director of the GMI had a large and ugly threat which he used to frighten his salesmen whenever one of them got out of line. He threatened to assign the unlucky culprit to the Slug settlements where no man was welcome, but which offered a large virgin territory for an aggressive go-getter who could solve the puzzling psychology of the surly, bad-smelling laborers.

Murk finished his heartbreaking lament, and grinned happily.

"She forgot to tell you," he announced.

"What?"

"The boss wants to see you right away three hours ago."

"Thanks for rushing the message," Glenn said morosely. "You'd better come in with me, and help me convince him that our talents would be wasted on the Slugs."

Murk's long pale face turned vague and stupid. He got up out of the chair in limp sections like a boneless, indolent reptile and followed Glenn across the outer office to the managerial suite. The busy clerks and accountants at the long rows of desks paid no attention to the gliding Greeno, but any Earthman seeing him for the first time would have sworn that he was a mindless, prehistoric monster. It had taken the practical Earthmen a long time to discover the subtle intelligence concealed by the passive defense of the Greenos, and they had not yet probed the depths of the knowledge hidden by the placid exterior.

They came into the small reception room in which Miss Jersey Prim

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presided, and Miss Prim was there, but she behaved as if they were not. Instead of the usual brisk, intelligent treatment with which she handled all visitors, she went on with what she was doing. It looked as though she were working off her anger by giving the place a thorough housecleaning.

"He busy?" Glenn asked diffidently.

All he got was a back view as she bent gracefully to delve into a lower compartment of her secretarial desk. This was such a flagrant neglect of duty that Glenn felt justified in proceeding to enter the private precinct unannounced, and Murk glided in after him.

Fillmore Sachs stopped shouting at his visiphone and glared at them.

"You clown!" he yelped. "You purple patched prodigal! You... No, not you!" he yelled at the visiphone, and cut it off with a vicious swipe. "You!" he croaked at Glenn.

FILLMORE SACHS was a man who took himself and his responsibilities with deadly seriousness. He was a difficult man to please. He was stocky, broad-faced and aggressive, and always reminded Glenn of a bulldog looking for a fight even when he was delivering one of his pep talks to the salesmen. He was a good manager because he was never satisfied, but Glenn had never seen him as dissatisfied as he was now.

He braced himself against the next blast, and inquired: "Did you want to see me, Fillmore?"

"I wish I had never seen you." His voice had fallen to an ominous growl. The visiphone buzzed angrily. He flipped the key and yelled: "Stop bothering me! Well, find one. Can't you follow orders? I don't care where you get her. I want her right now!"

Murk moved limply to a wide armchair and melted into it, grinning fatuously, and drawing the full force of the managerial wrath.

"Stop laughing at me, you overgrown imbecile! Stop acting like this is a silly game. Can't you get it through your green head that business is work?"

"Murk work," the Martian repeated childishly.

"You do not! All you do is—Agh! What am I talking to you for?" He turned on Glenn and lowered his voice to the bulldog growl. "Where have you been all day?"

"Scott works too," Glenn said hastily. "My health won't stand much more of this overtime grind. I—"

"Your expense account won't stand it either. The Chamber of Commerce won't stand it. I won't stand it. And what do you mean by driving my secretary off the job?"

"What?"

"You heard me. She quit. She says you told her to."

"No, no. I didn't tell her anything of the sort." Glenn seized upon the diversion in an effort to keep Sachs off his own tail. "She's just putting on an act because she's sore. She'll get over it. She always does. You know what she wanted me to do?"

"Never mind that. You've got no business mixing your personal affairs with business. I've warned you about that before. I knew it was bound to cause friction. Now I'm left stranded high and dry without a secretary, and the business office can't find a replacement. You cause me more trouble than all the rest of the sales force put together. I don't know why I put up with it."

"Just a minute, Fillmore. You haven't got the whole picture. I was trying to protect your interests when I turned down Jersey's proposition. She wanted to quit being your secretary and take Murk's place as my assistant. I said no, flatly and firm-

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ly. Was I right? Would you approve any such silly arrangement as that?"

"Certainly not." Sachs hunched over his desk craftily and slipped in his punch. "Especially in view of the fact that your new territory in the Slug settlements is no place for a woman."

"That's fine," Glenn said, riding the punch. "I'll be glad to break the ice for you, Fillmore, and open up the Slug territory for your less aggressive salesmen. Of course, I've got a tremendous volume of business lined up among the Northern Greeno tribes. I was planning to bring them into the Association before Boyd's can get a line in there. But if you say so, I'll just forget about it. Let Boyd's have them if you'd rather have me spend the Association time and money preparing the ground for a doubtful campaign among the Slugs."

"Stop yapping. Stop trying to high-pressure me."

"I thought you'd want to know. I'd hate to see you hand Boyd's all that Northern Greeno business. And of course, I can't guarantee any success with the Slugs. Murk can tell you how tough it will be trying to break down their fixed habits. They're secretive and resent any intrusion in their private lives. It will take a long time. Am I right, Murk?"

"Right," Murk grinned obligingly.

"You think it over, Fillmore. Let me know your decision. And meanwhile, I'll see what I can do for you with Jersey. I think she wants to be coaxed." He winked at the suspicious scowl with which Sachs was now regarding him, and waved Murk out ahead of him. "Leave it to Scott, the boy wonder of the Martian Tundra. I've never failed you yet."

THIS STRATEGIC exit was halted in the reception room where Jersey Prim was adjusting a flimsy bit of headgear, preparatory to leaving.

"Look, baby." Glenn stepped up behind her and touched her elbow gently. "Glenn isn't himself today. I've got a terrific headache and you mustn't mind what I say. If I made you mad, I'm sorry. Take off your hat, and stay awhile, rose-lips. I need you, and the boss is sore."

"So am I." She twitched her arm out of his grasp and picked up her handbag and an assortment of packages containing her belongings. "It's too late to change your tune. I've already accepted the position with Boyd's which you were kind enough to suggest."

There was an agonized yelp from the doorway where Fillmore Sachs had appeared. "You can't do this!" he howled. "Such disloyalty will not be tolerated!"

"So I was right!" Glenn choked. "You have been talking to Oswald. You've been seeing him behind my back while I was slaving over hot prospects—"

"Goodbye, Mr. Sachs," Jersey said pointedly. "I wish you luck with your demoralized salesmen. You're going to need it."

Murk slid out of the way with unaccustomed agility as she marched out like an Amazon in full battle array a dangerous glint in her dark eyes.

"You nincompoop!" Sachs breathed hoarsely. "You incompetent four-flusher. You brassbound, ringtailed, imitation ape. Do you realize that she is walking out of here with full knowledge of all the confidential data of the Association, and carrying it straight to Oswald U. Sparks? If you had worked at it steadily you couldn't have pulled a more disastrous blunder. Why you..." His descriptive vocabulary was both colorful and inexhaustible. His voice had taken on the sound of rusty nails being pulled out of old

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timber. His fists were waving menacingly when the lanky chief clerk appeared leading a brown-haired girl with her hands full of notebooks and assorted pencils.

In comparison to the vivid beauty of Jersey Prim, this girl had the prettiness of a neat little wren, and her manner was timid. Sachs broke off his tirade to glare at her.

"This is—" the clerk began.

"What are you doing in here?" Sachs roared, and the timid wren burst into tears and tried to escape.

The lanky clerk caught her arm, and explained hastily: "This is your new secretary, Miss Alta Hope. She comes from the Lapsed Department. I think you'll find her satisfactory, as soon as she—er, gets adjusted. She has been with the Association . . ."

Murk slid out under cover of the distraction, and Glenn did a fair imitation of the Martian glide as he, too, faded through the door. They retreated all the way to Glenn's office where Murk draped himself across one side of the desk and propped his long chin in a limp hand.

"We have headaches," he stated suggestively.

"You, too?"

"Why not?" Murk lifted his free hand and touched the discolored bump with facile fingers. "Craik Doctor will be pleased to see us."

"As you say, why not?" Glenn viewed his assistant with an understanding gleam. "After all, an injury like that needs special attention. No one can possibly object if I take you to your doctor. Let's go."

THE APARTMENT of the Greeno physician was on the second floor of a crescent shaped building. The front of the two-story building matched the curve of one of the circular streets which surrounded the heart of the city, intersecting like giant petals of a flower. It had the usual wide balcony to acommodate the Angels, and the interior of the apartment was spacious and wonderfully restful. Soft, low couches and long chairs in pale neutral gray could be lighted colorfully to suit the mood of visitors or patients.

Dr. Craik was indeed pleased to see them. He and Murk sang a brief duet, at the end of which the doctor produced a poultice which he fixed to Murk's head; and his slim, graceful daughter appeared with a tall pitcher from which she dispensed a soothing libation. In a little while three Angels appeared on the balcony, babbling their incessant nonsense. They did not come in immediately, but began a slow chant and a weaving dance on the open balcony. Their small, beautifully formed bodies made a silhouette pattern on the transparent tissue which screened the front of the apartment.

"That is for you." Craik grinned at Glenn. "They think you are going away on another sales trip."

"So they are inviting all their friends and relatives to a party," Glenn murmured. "I hope you don't mind."

"Why should I mind?"

"Because you spoke as if we are not going away on another sales trip, although Murk and I had planned to start North tomorrow." Glenn knew better than to ask direct questions of the gifted Greeno.

"I think not," Craik answered politely, but offered no more.

"That is also a good reason for a party," Murk yawned.

"Something tells me I am being led astray," Glenn said. "But it's a delightful way to cure a headache."

The three dainty silhouettes were joined by others, and the chant became livelier and the dance more intricate. Inside a soft blue light came

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up slowly, and Glenn became aware of it so gradually that it seemed to grow from his own mood rather than from the sensitive fingers of the Martian doctor as they played over the color keys. The pleasure which the light-hearted Angels always brought was colored by the thoughtful, blue mood. He wondered if Craik was deliberately fostering the mood. He wondered if the intelligent Martian really cared what an Earthman's mood might be. Of all the Greeno trades and professions, the medics were the most mysterious, and also the most necessary to the insurance companies.

The Martian medical profession was an ancient and honorable science which had been handed down from one generation to the next among the Greeno tribes, and which served all three races on the Main Continent. They willingly accepted appointments as medical examiners for the insurance companies. This was fortunate, inasmuch as the red-blooded doctors from Earth were still baffled by certain aspects of Martian biology. Their efforts at research were halted by the blank wall of passive stupidity which they encountered whenever they became too curious about intimate details. They had been forced to respect the taboos with which the cool-skinned races surrounded their biological secrets.

Nevertheless insurance was a popular form of investment among the Greenos. They understood it. The Martian economy was based on a form of insurance which provided security according to the needs of the three races. The system was not economically fair according to Earth standards, but it suited the Martians. All of the wealth was produced by the hard-working Slugs, who lived in comparative poverty and contributed the products of their labor to the support of the Greeno tribes, who in turn administered the public wealth, making a generous provision for the unproductive Angels.

GLENN SCOTT'S affection for the gaudy Angels was not generally shared by the practical business men of Earth. He was not the analytical type, and seldom examined his own motives and habits, but his present difficulties had brought him face to face with a troublesome question. Glenn loved the Angels, and they loved him back. It was as simple and pleasant as that. But it was becoming painfully evident that this mutual fondness might cost him plenty. Maybe, he thought glumly, both Jersey Prim and Fillmore Sachs were right, and he was only kidding himself when he pretended that the playful Angels were indispensable in the solicitation of insurance. He sighed unhappily, and wondered how he could discourage his little friends in order to win back the affections of the temperamental Miss Prim.

Suddenly they were dancing into the room, leaping and twirling with unearthly grace, and he knew he must postpone any attempt to discourage their affectionate attention.

"Goodbye—goodbye, sweetheart!" they chorused. "Hurry back, darling. Goodbye, sweetheart..."

Glenn sat up and cried: "No, no, no. I am not going."

"Ooh...ooh!" they trilled. "Not going. Glenn is not going. Surprise. Surprise." And then they made a song out of that, spontaneously and amusingly.

They discovered the poultice on Murk's head, lifted it tenderly, and exclaimed over the shocking bruise. And then they began to examine Glenn, singing sadly about a thoroughly preposterous accident which had befallen their favorite insurance salesman. Their small, six-fingered hands

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plucked at him and caressed him, and they snuggled down against him, vibrating with pleasure at the contact, and sipping out of his goblet. The blue light deepened to violet and changed subtly to warm rose, and Glenn looked across at Doctor Craik. The Greeno returned a bland, placid gaze and offered a surprisingly personal remark.

"You have an unusual affinity for the green-blooded people. You are instinctively natural, in spite of your aggressive red blood. You are what your Earth races would call a nature lover, and that is why our people find you congenial. You do not have the smell of antagonism."

"I wish my people could understand it that way," Glenn said ruefully, and suddenly he laughed and all the Angels laughed with him, a joyous, tinkling sound.

Quite suddenly Glenn saw the busy, bustling Earthmen in their furiously comical pursuit of Martian wealth as they must have looked to the placid Martians. All their elaborate contrivances for carrying on legitimate trade and business were so much nonsense, designed to screen their real intentions to acquire the valuable minerals and metals, and the priceless products of the Slug tissue looms. But under their serio-comic business was the smell of antagonism.

"In other words," Glenn laughed, "they stink."

"The Slugs," Murk agreed lazily. His large sandals had been removed and the Angels were tickling his feet. His eyes were half closed in sensual pleasure and his voice purred. "They smell very rotten. And we are already contaminated because we must go and sell them insurance."

"No, no. I meant—" Glenn tried to explain. But his words were drowned in the chorus of objections from the Angels. The very mention of the Slugs drove them into excited fits of dainty horror. But Murk's frightful suggestion prompted them to desert their favorite insurance salesman and begin at once the cleansing ritual, which was a highly entertaining performance.

"You did that on purpose," Glenn reproached Murk. "I was talking about the unmentionables."

"You enjoy the cleansing, too," Murk grinned. "And we are probably going to need it."

"Yes, but it takes so much time, and such extravagant libations. Now Dr. Craik is stuck with a full scale orgy, and we..." Glenn's futile objections trailed off as the ritual moved into its first phase.

The meaning of the complicated performance was a deep mystery, which Glenn understood no better now than when he had first witnessed it. The biological origin of certain phases was unmistakable, but the meaning of the whole was as obscure as the result of those same processes. Where and how the Angels produced their offspring was a total mystery. When the young Angels first appeared, they were fully developed, and no Earthman had ever seen a baby Angel. The eagerness of Earth scientists to solve this puzzle had nearly wrecked interplanetary relations, and the Chamber of Commerce had issued stern injunctions to protect the hereditary taboos. The profits of business were more useful than a scientific treatise on the genetics of a parasite race.

The light became a murky green, and the Angels drifted and floated like underwater creatures through a secret cavern, performing mysterious rites. Glenn's last touch with Earthly reality floated away, and he became fully absorbed in the mystic spell of the exotic ritual, carried along on the weirdly beautiful choral music.

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MRS. MURK was long, slim and languidly graceful. On the street she wore the flowing draperies which the Greeno women had assumed with the advent of the Earthmen. The women added a picturesque note to the colorful streets of Alexandria as they glided along with dreamlike ease. But when Mrs. Murk appeared clinging to the rear seat of Jersey Prim's speeding scooter, her draperies flying and her long limbs wrapped around the seat, she struck a jangling note which was both startling and disconcerting. The Earthmen muttered blasphemously about the dangers of feminism, the Angels shrilled with horror whenever the scooter passed, and the Greenos grinned patiently and sympathized with Murk, but seemed to be more amused than alarmed.

"There must be some way to discourage them," Glenn muttered desperately. They were relaxing in Glenn's apartment and Murk had just finished a pathetic love song with improvised words in his tribal dialect. Glenn understood enough of the dialect to appreciate the fact that Mrs. Murk was too busy for love, and the deprivation was causing her husband unusual pain.

Glenn, too, was suffering unusual pain. In spite of what she had done, the vivid personality and flashing charm of Jersey Prim had become twice as desirable, now that he could no longer take her for granted. She behaved as if she neither knew nor cared what happened to Glenn, although it was well known that he was in serious trouble. There was a strong rumor that Glenn Scott was going native, and the penalty for that was public disgrace and prompt deportation by order of the Chamber of Commerce Commission on Interplanetary Ethics and Morals.

The impromptu orgy at Dr. Craik's apartment had resulted in suspension for the star salesman and his personal assistant. Glenn was grateful for Murk's loyalty. Among the Earthmen he no longer had friends or sympathizers. They all blamed Glenn for the unwomanly spectacle of Jersey Prim and Mrs. Murk. But they excused Oswald U. Sparks for taking advantage of the situation. The girls were, in fact, selling insurance hand over fist through a new approach to the distaff side of Greeno households.

"There must be some way to discourage them," Glenn repeated.

"Too much business," Murk observed tolerantly.

"I know what you mean. It's hard to discourage success. But we are losing them both to Oswald U. Sparks' greed. It's intolerable."

"Disgraceful, too," Murk added complacently. "Even the Angels are laughing at us."

"It won't be very funny if I have to stand trial before the Chamber of Commerce Commission. I'll have no defense at all, unless I can win Jersey back. If we were married, they couldn't make the charges stick. No Earthman goes native on his honeymoon. But she won't even let me talk to her."

"It is time to go," Murk yawned. He stretched indolently and slid off Glenn's bed where he had spent the afternoon. "Murk has a new rule. I must fetch her home at the end of business, because she is tired and I am unemployed."

"Jersey!" Glenn groaned. "That's more of her high-handed interference. You ought to put your foot down."

"Where?" Murk inquired reasonably.

"On Mrs. Murk's neck," Glenn growled.

"You come and show me how. The neck is above. How can you put your foot down on it?"

"You know what I mean."

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"Of course. I also know that you do not mean it. You are only making aggressive noises. That will not help us. Come, we will both go and make love noises. Sooner or later they will take pity on us."

"Am I a wolf or a worm?" Glenn muttered unhappily, but he trailed along because even humiliation was preferable to lonely inaction.

JERSEY AND Mrs. Murk were enjoying an imported strawberry sundae in the commissary of Boyd's House. They looked like two contented pussy cats lapping up cream, and made no objection when Murk and Glenn joined them without asking permission. Their intense self-satisfaction made Glenn wary, and he was not relieved by the kindly gaze Jersey turned on him. It was a superior sort of kindliness, and her voice was full of compassion as she inquired: "How are you feeling, Glenn?"

It gave him the distinct impression of being sick abed. "What's the matter with me?" he asked suspiciously.

Jersey smiled gently. "Quite a few people are wondering."

"You know what's the matter with me," he said angrily, and felt the pressure of one of Murk's large sandals under the table. He swallowed his indignation and looked across at the serene smile on the long, pale face of Mrs. Murk. She lowered her eyes and spooned up the expensive confection with deliberate enjoyment. The imported strawberries were a rare treat.

"The girls are celebrating," Murk observed. "They have had a good business today. Are you tired, Murk-love?"

"Tired," she said languidly, and gave him a cool look.

"You are working too hard," Murk murmured fondly. "You must take tomorrow off, and let me—"

"No, you don't," Jersey laughed sweetly. "Business comes first. Remember? That's what you always told Mrs. Murk when you and Glenn were busy entertaining your prospects. And we are much too busy to take any time off. We have just swung the biggest deal—"

"Ah-ah!" a grating voice warned. "Hold it, baby. We are not ready to make the formal announcement yet." The dapper, bright-eyed Agency Manager of Boyd's put a possessive hand on Jersey's shoulder, and smirked at Glenn. "What are you doing in Boyd's House? Looking for a job?" he asked insultingly.

"Take your hands off her!" Glenn raged, and lunged to his feet, only to have Murk's long arms wrapped around him. As he was dragged out, he saw the waiting gang of Boyd's employees who had been prepared to subdue him if he attacked Oswald U. Sparks, and knew that Murk had saved him from a bad beating, as well as a serious charge. Nevertheless, he was not grateful for being deprived of the chance to poke, and possibly flatten, the sharp nose of Oswald U. Sparks.

"Let me loose, you animated rope!" he choked when they were back on the street. But Murk shoved him into a convenient whiz-car, dropped a coin in the pay slot and took off before Glenn could straighten himself out on the cushions.

"What do you think you're doing?" Glenn panted in some amazement at the Martian's haste.

"Escaping," Murk grinned. "You have given me an excellent reason for escaping from the onerous service which Murk now demands. She cannot complain if I am busy saving your life. I think," he added smugly, "it may take several days."

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"It may take a lifetime," Glenn groaned, "if you detour through any more forbidden pastures. And meanwhile that rat-faced thief is stealing Jersey Prim, and all the insurance business for miles around. We may as well face it, Murk. There is only one way out. I've got to take on the Slug territory, and you've got to help me."

"Why?" Murk inquired blankly.

"Can't you see, you dumbhead? It's the only way I can possibly redeem myself with the GMI, and put a stop to these rumors that I am going native. If I spend all my time with the Slugs, there will be no more parties, and the Angels will leave me strictly alone. It will break my heart, but it has to be done."

"The girls," Murk declared, "have already done it."

"What? What do you mean?"

"The big insurance deal they are so proud of. That was the Slugs. They are now selling hundred year policies to the Slugs."

"How do you know?"

"Because I suggested it to Murk. The Slugs are ruled by the females. You know that. Therefore, the female approach got results. They are very proud of the results, and we have nothing to worry about."

"Nothing to worry— Why, you double-crossing son of an eel! How could you do this to me?" Glenn gasped and sank back on the cushions. "You have ruined me, Murk. Finally and completely. This is the end."

"You are so innocent," Murk grinned. "You still do not know. I have taken so much trouble to educate you, and you still do not know. You Earthmen must have everything put into hard, ugly words, even the unspeakable things. You have no place in your brains for the unspeakable knowledge. Craik Doctor would have been so pleased to see us again. We might have had time now for a three day festival, but you are so Earthly innocent."

THE WHIZ-CAR circled into the center of one of the plazas around which the circular streets curved, and lifted abruptly. They turned Southwest toward the rolling hummocks of dull gray moss which covered the Martian tundra.

Murk's unusually direct statement had turned Glenn thoughtful. He pulled at his lower lip, puzzling over the odd accusation of innocence. It was this subdued concentration on Glenn's part which caused them to be stranded far out on the spongy, moss grown tundra. If he had not been so absorbed in the puzzle it would have occurred to him that the whiz-car needed a certain number of coins to keep it going. Murk's Greeno mentality never bothered about practical or mechanical details. They drifted down into a place of low, moss-covered mounds. The regular mounds had been indistinguishable from above, but as the car settled, bouncing gently on the thick moss, the mounds loomed up in the afterglow of the long Martian twilight.

"A Slug cemetery," Glenn growled. "A fine place to spend the night. All my efforts to educate you have also been wasted. It would have been so simple to ask me if I had brought any coins before you took off on a cross-country tour. You must know by this time that my credit card won't work on these things."

"So it seems," Murk answered complacently. "I have always considered that an oversight on the part of your technologists." He spread himself comfortably, laid his long head back, and sang into the deepening purple night. The tonal effect was eerie in that

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open space and seemed to spread upward and outward in waves. It went on for a long time, and Glenn marveled at the lung power, while trying to decipher the theme which was repeated over and over. As far as he could tell, Murk was addressing a plea to Mrs. Murk to come and brighten his dark life. After a while Murk's voice stilled on a soft note, and the wide deep silence of the lifeless tundra closed over them. It was as if there had never been a sound in that place, but only millenniums of stillness.

When the sound came it startled Glenn as much as if it had been a loud explosion. He leaped and sank back on the cushions trembling. Murk had not stirred. It was a tiny sound, and now it was repeated: "Eep. Eep."

Glenn got control of the breath that was strangling him, and tried to analyze the sound. It was like a child's voice, alone and frightened in the dark. "Eep. Eep." The pitiful sound stirred him, urging him to do something for the creature that was crying.

"Maybe you don't hear it," he said dryly. "But there's a little something—"

"A little Angel," Murk replied. "I think it may be having some trouble. Getting born."

"Getting born? Here? In this ghastly place, all alone?" Glenn started to his feet. "Well, don't just sit there, you spineless dumbhead. Do something. Can't we—"

"Eep. Eep. Ooh!" the creature shrilled agitatedly.

Glenn stepped out of the car and went bouncing and leaping over the sponge moss in the direction of the sound. He clung to the mound, hoping it would not sink under him as the moss under his feet was already sinking. His arms plunged into the yielding growth and held on a solid frame and he began tearing away the soft, sponge growth.

"Eep-eep-eep," the little thing inside wailed, and Murk came across the treacherous moss in long strides and ripped at the mound from the bottom, stripping the growth from the roots and clearing an opening.

HE REACHED a long arm inside and carefully pulled a bundle through into the dimming light. Something stirred under the cobwebby wrappings and the musty odor of it spread and stifled Glenn so that he let go of the solid framework and started to sink. When he had pulled himself back to safety he saw that Murk was sprawled on top of the mound doing something to the cobweb bundle with long, delicate fingers. He crawled up beside the Martian and watched the small, dead-white form emerge quivering from the smothering cocoon.

"A lovely little girl," Murk murmured.

"How do you know? Oh, yes, I see. Are they all born fully developed?"

"Why not? They have already lived at least fifty years. I think she has hurt her wing a little. Craik Doctor can fix that. Give me your jacket."

Glenn crouched on the mound, staring through the dusk at the calm Greeno. "What did you say?" he croaked.

"It is a thing you should have understood long ago. The Metamorphosites. They live fifty years as Slugs, produce their offspring, and die, after which the metamorphosis takes place, and they emerge as Angels, to live another fifty years. Their character and personality is so completely changed that they cannot bear the thought of any connection with the ugly Slugs. That is why we preserve their secret, because it is more pleas-

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ant to allow them to enjoy their lives as Angels. Give me your jacket, and then see if you can jump back to the car without vanishing under the moss."

Back in the car, Murk said: "Here. You hold her. I am falling asleep and I may squeeze her. You are wide awake."

Glenn took the little thing in his arms half fearfully. The musty smell seemed to be growing less stifling, and a strange thrill shot through him as the brand new, unadorned Angel snuggled contentedly against him, her crippled wing protruding awkwardly. An unbearable tenderness moved him, and he regarded the strange knowledge of the Metamorphosites without shock, almost without surprise because of his familiarity with the Angel customs and rituals. He understood now a great deal of the mystery, and could interpret much of the exotic rituals to which his friend Murk had introduced him. He was indeed wide awake, and remained so all night, holding the new risen Angel with a growing fondness. It was almost as if she belonged to him, though he knew he would have to let her go when Dr. Craik had repaired her twisted wing.

Soon after dawn another whiz-car appeared with Jersey Prim at the controls, and Mrs. Murk smiling serenely at her sleepy husband.

"Good morning, Murk-love," he yawned, and held out a long hand into which his wife dropped three coins.

Glenn was unprepared for this opportune arrival, and stared in some bewilderment, forgetting the careful plans he had made through the long night. He had hoped to break the news to Jersey gently, at the proper time and place, and thus save her from the disastrous results of selling the Slugs insurance policies which would be payable in the middle of their lives when they died and were buried as Slugs.

"Can't you say good morning to me, Glenn?" Jersey asked.

There was a warm glint in her dark eyes, but Glenn was so bemused that he could only stammer foolishly: "Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I suppose you and Mrs. Murk are on your way to sell more insurance to the female Slugs. But you can't do it, Jersey. It's—it's all wrong. I mean, you're making a terrible mistake."

"Indeed." She bridled at this obvious criticism, and the warm glint heated to something more than friendly appeal. "So you've been snooping around and spying on me. That's what you're doing out here."

"Eeep!" the little Angel protested and stirred in Glenn's arms.

"Oh! What is that?" Jersey cried, as the Angel poked her head over Glenn's shoulder, and squealed in childish fright. "So that's what—" Jersey gasped, and the full flood of her quick anger glowed in a rosy flush. "It's true! You have gone native, and I thought—Oh! I meant to forgive you. After what Oswald did last night, I was furious with him. I meant to tell you that—that I was mistaken about him and..." She choked on the verge of tears.

"You were mistaken," Glenn said hotly. "Listen. I can explain everything. This is just a baby Angel, and I—"

"It is not!" Jersey shrieked. "Do you think I can't see? It looks completely naked from here. Let it go! How can you sit there fondling it right in front of me?"

"I can't let it go. It's just been born, and it—she's got a busted wing. Listen, I tell you, you don't know what you're talking about. I can explain—"

"You native beast!" Jersey cried, and the whiz-car started with a jolt

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that threw Mrs. Murk into an indecent sprawl, and the thin whine of its speed quickly diminished.

"They'll burn a connection," Murk observed. "I hope we don't have to stop and pick them up. Craik Doctor will be pleased to see us." He dropped a coin into the slot, and they lifted much more gently and drifted back towards Alexandria.

FILLMORE SACHS was furiously busy, revising the sales system of the GMI, reassigning territories to the sales staff, and altering methods of procedure. The same busy furor of reorganization was going on in all the business houses of the city, new rules and regulations had been drawn up by the executive committee of the Chamber of Commerce, with frequent consultations with Glenn Scott as newly appointed adviser and liaison agent. The secret of the Angels was safe. The business men of Earth had unanimously approved Glenn's resolution to preserve the Angels' status as a separate race, and to maintain silence about the unspeakable knowledge.

Glenn strolled past the three busy secretaries in the reception room, and entered the private office without knocking.

"Don't come barging in here without— Oh, it's you. I, uh—I was hoping you could spare some time to talk over this new policy." Fillmore Sachs growled pleasantly, like a friendly bulldog. "I want you to know the GMI is proud of you, my boy. I guess I don't have to tell you—"

"You don't," Glenn said shortly. "I don't want any thanks for giving you business men a new scheme for getting your hooks on more of the Martian wealth. That new policy I outlined for the Slugs is all right just as it stands. It's based on a life expectancy of fifty years, and protects them against accident during the period of metamorphosis."

"Fine, fine. I understand Boyd's took quite a loss on the business they were rushing through. Chamber of Commerce made them pay off on the face value, less the unaccrued benefits, for the privilege of recalling the policies. Terrible blunder," Fillmore growled enthusiastically. "Awful blow to their prestige. Imagine basing their premiums on a one hundred year expectancy, and having all the policy holders die in half the time. Awful. They should give you a vote of thanks for stopping it when you did. That fellow Sparks won't last. He's too anxious to pull a fast one. I suppose the executive committee of the Chamber will recommend his recall, eh?"

"I am not at liberty to discuss the committee's action, but there is one matter they have not acted on yet. I asked them to hold up the action until I could talk to you. You put in a request to have Jersey Prim deported. I want you to withdraw the request, and hire her back here as your secretary."

"What—why—wh—" Sachs sputtered furiously. "I can't do that! She's proved herself disloyal, a trouble maker—"

"You'll do it," Glenn said confidently. "Or I'll see that you don't get any of the new Slug business. It'll sell like hotcakes, Fillmore, because it has the official Martian approval. Be a shame to miss out on it."

"All r i g h t," Fillmore groaned hoarsely. "Tell her to come in and see me."

"You tell her. She won't let me come near her—yet." Glenn grinned in a bland imitation of the Greeno expression. "But she'll come around in time, and I am certainly not going to let her be shipped back to Earth now that she understands Martian customs."

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"If she understands them, she's a better man than I am!" Fillmore blustered angrily. "All this mess of reorganization. Why couldn't those Greeno imbeciles have given our research analysts the correct facts in the first place, instead of implying that the Slugs had a life span of one hundred years, and the Angels—"

"Careful, Fillmore. Mustn't talk about the unspeakable mysteries. As for the Slugs, they do live approximately one hundred years. They are dead, but they live on as Angels. The Greenos gave your analysts the correct information as they saw it. And as long as you are doing business on Mars, you'll have to see it that way, too. I am sure Miss Prim will be a big help to you, and you will be glad to have her back here."

"Uh," Fillmore said glumly, and then his sagging face brightened shrewdly. "There's a sales meeting this afternoon. You're just in time to address the boys, give them some of your—"

"No, thanks. I'm on my way to Dr. Craik's home. We're having a coming-out party for my adopted Angel. Craik did a fine job on her busted wing, and she's all set to soar. I wouldn't miss it for worlds."

HE WAVED his hand with a peculiar Greeno twist, and went down to the garage for his scooter. Murk was draped on the rear seat, and opened one eye languidly, tightening his long limbs on the seat as Glenn got aboard.

"You're in terrible shape," Glenn said caustically. "If you get any sleepier, I'm going to bury you some place. Aren't you and Mrs. Murk through making up yet?"

"We love very much," Murk admitted dreamily. "It is very lovely."

"I don't know what you're making up for, you were never mad at each other in the first place. Mrs. Murk came right after you when you sent out your call that night on the tundra."

"You are learning," Murk observed placidly, as they sliced through the slow moving crowds on the boulevard. "You are learning."

"I am learning," Glenn repeated with Greeno smugness. "I know that you Greenos communicate over a considerable distance with your songs. It must be some kind of wave vibration. Can the Angels do it?"

"You find out," Murk yawned lazily. "You have an Angel of your own now. You find out from her."

"That means they can do it," Glenn grinned. "Otherwise, there would be nothing for me to find out. You see, I am also learning to take your nonsense literally."

They turned through an arched passageway and parked in the white courtyard at the rear of Dr. Craik's apartment. Murk drifted up the curving ramp and Glenn followed more awkwardly, hearing the babbling Angel voices which were interrupted and stilled as Murk and Dr. Craik greeted each other musically. He hummed the greeting with them and felt a faint vibration stirring along his nerves, and as he entered the spacious main room the voices of the two Greenos soared with unusual exuberance, and he knew they were aware that he had caught the vibration.

A small glittering creature sailed across the room and dropped into his arms, and he pressed his face against her fragrant pink and gold body, so moved by the willing acceptance which the Martians were offering him that his eyes stung with tears, and emotion clogged his throat.

He carried his Angel to a wide couch and the others fluttered and tiptoed around them, gazing with big eyes, their small mouths open in si-

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lent delight until the Greeno duet ended. They had a gay new chant about Glenn which they took up immediately, and he was startled to hear Jersey's name included. For the first time, he paid close attention to the seeming nonsense of their song, and a sobering knowledge came to him. He knew now what these people expected of him. They thought he could teach the Earthmen to understand them, as he was beginning to understand them.

It would be a long and tedious job, converting the busy businessmen of Earth. A soft, golden light stole over the room, and suddenly he laughed, and all the Angels laughed with him, their silvery voices pealing joyously. It was not going to be a tedious job at all. It was going to be fun, more fun than he had ever had before, because he had all the Martians with him, and all their strange gifts at his disposal.

Happiness and confidence overwhelmed him, and he began to kiss the Angels.

"Oh—kissing!" they trilled excitedly, and took turns darting at him.

"That's for now," Glenn laughed. "Because soon I am going on my honeymoon, and none of you can see me. Not even you, little one." He patted the small pink and gold creature at his side. "The honeymoon is unspeakable, but before and also afterwards, we will have a three day party."

"That is a good reason for a party?" Murk mumbled.

"Why not? Love is a good reason for anything, as you should know."

"Mrs. Murk," the Martian sighed. "She will also wish to go on a honeymoon, because she must learn to do everything her friend Jersey does. You will have to teach me how to go on a honeymoon."

"Gladly," Glenn grinned, and caught Dr. Craik's suave look. "You might even learn to like it, eh Doctor?"

"I think so," Dr. Craik answered politely. "If it is what I think it is. And I am sure it is."

The Angels began to sing: "Ooh—happy, happy honeymoon. Up and down the happy town. Far away and back again, the honeymoon will soon begin, and if it's what I think it is—ooh—"

THE END

THE EVIL MARTIANS DO . . .

★ **By Charles Recour** ★

RIX LAMSON'S fingers played a gentle tattoo on the keyboard and the servos responded, automatic valves opening and slithering shut in answer to the electromagnetic commands. The slim, hundred-foot hull of the *Explorer I* slipped unhesitatingly into the perihelion of the ever-decreasing ellipse that was to bring into gently to the Martian surface a thousand miles below.

Rix breathed a sigh of relief and leaned back in the bucket seat before the board. He stretched and yawned after the tense tedious work of following the computations. This is it, he thought. He glanced at the chronometer—only seven more hours! And man will land on Mars for the first time!

Strangely there was less elation than he expected. The tenseness and alertness required for the first interplanetary trip was a far cry from the frequent Moon-runs he had made. Rix found himself almost thinking of this experience as a job—which he knew it was not. Certainly this privelaged attempt couldn't be called that.

After he tired of gazing at the Martian nearness, Rix drifted to the galley and had something to eat. He was not really hungry. The nervous intensity was becoming too strong to permit hunger. He glanced at the radio. It was useless for the moment. The bulk of the planet lay between the *Explorer I* and Earth's sphe-

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roid. No chance to beam a pulse through, even though for the last month the Lunar station had been tracking him. Oh well, he get a chance to drop another communication before the ship settled its bulk.

In an elliptical orbit of ever-decreasing minor diameter Rix's ship approached closer and closer to the Red Planet. The vegetation patches and the *canali*—clearly shown by the 'scopes on Luna—were just as he expected and no novelty, but through his own scopes he saw patches of surprising area that could indicate only one thing—cities!

When the rocket was swinging in its last orbital glance, a mere fifty miles above the surface, Rix half-awaited the greeting of flying ships of some kind, still capable of boting into the thin Martian air. But there was no breath of life stirring to greet him.

At an ever and rapidly decreasing altitude the rocket came nearer and nearer to the surface and now Rix was skimming low over the land. Twice he saw clearly, the complex and labyrinthine mounds of stone and metal. Mars was—or had been inhabited! That was certain.

Rix watched till his eyeballs ached seeking to peer into the shells he'd shortly visit. And as he watched a soft rustling caught his ears. He jerked to alertness and then as he understood the alternately waxing and waning sound, a great sadness clutched at him and he realized he would never greet a Martian and that the planet lying beneath his skittering rocket was as dead as Moses. No living or laughing or loving would ever be done here except by Earthmen—for Mars was empty of life and the whispering sound from the outer detectors spelled the cryptic answer.

Radiation!

The Geigers rustled softly each time the rocket skimmed a Martian city, their voices rising in a little symphony of death and then softened into silence when the rocket passed. The Martian cities were radio-active and when Rix read the gauges and touched the computers, he knew that though men would walk through those cities, Martians would not ever again. The residual radiation told the story for there was enough left to be dangerous possibly for humans.

What must it have been like before?—before time had half-healed the gaping scars of atomic warfare with which the Martians must have ruthlessly wiped themselves out? Would the records show their love of life?

A tired bitter feeling crept into Rix's brain and the triumph of the coming landing was as ashes in his mouth. He thought: I'm landing on a gigantic tomb. Why does this have to be? The soul sickness and the sorrow made mockery of Man's efforts. With ineffable sorrow Rix gingerly set the rocket down and prepared to walk the Martian cemetary, the repository of a billion dreams, studded with the shadow and trace of living handiwork, the great empty cities of malignant horror.

The *Explorer I* landed on the dead Martian globe...

ATOMIC GARBAGE CAN!

★ By A. Morris ★

THE QUESTION of what to do with radioactive materials which are waste products, is growing bigger every day. The future demands some sort of solution, because atomic energy installations are delivering enormous quantities of these wasteful by-products, useless—but deadly.

At present the major method of disposal is to place the material in metal cans four feet long, eight feet high and six feet wide. Then the can is buried in the earth and covered over with concrete. Each such disposal unit costs almost two thousand dollars! At this rate we'll go to the poorhouse, admit the atomic scientists. Some other technique must be discovered.

Similar storage is done with liquid radioactive wastes and millions of gallons of this material clutter up atomic energy areas. With research accelerating as well as production, the disposal is becoming serious, very serious indeed.

A number of solutions have been proposed—and rejected. It has been suggested that the radioactives be sealed in concrete blocks and buried far out at sea. Scientists don't do this for fear that eventually the concrete will be corroded away and the wastes released. These wastes could then poison fish and perhaps reach humans. So that's out.

Others have suggested that special rockets be built and the material then placed in them and hurled into space to circle the earth as minor satellites. This is rather fanciful at present and constitutes hardly a logical solution. After all we don't want to clutter up the space lanes to the Moon with rocketing debris!—even if we could.

Since there is no way to change radioactive rates—at least for now—we will have to be content with the Earth disposal. But this can't go on forever. The Atomic Energy Commission is willing and ready to listen to any suggestions. Do you know how to get hundreds and hundreds of tons of highly dangerous lethal radioactive matter? If you do, open your mouth in the direction of the A.E.C. and holler—they'll listen!

★ ★ ★

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HELL IS WHERE

By Gilbert Grant

All enemies of the Government were sent to Purgatory X. But strangely, this punishment was an unexpected blessing . . .

SHE WAS there somewhere, just ahead of him in the hall of electronic exhibits.

He could hear the dancing patter of her feet. He caught sight of her, quickened his run, and cornered her behind one of a pair of Robo-clerks.

She was smiling, and her narrowed

In the sealed chamber he was suddenly caught in a powerful bolt of electrical force...

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eyes drew him toward her with a veiled, mysterious message.

"Zeena! Wait. I've got to say it; I love you, Zeena."

There was a whirring and clicking, as of levers and discs falling into place, and then the sterile, metallic voice of the metal man: "If this is adolescent love, please fill out form Zn-06584973. Do not fail to state the time of your last psychiatric examination."

She was a mist-clothed wraith dancing away from him. Now she was behind the other Robo-clerk. He tried to squeeze past the first but the metal arms spread wide and he knew better than to find himself in their crushing embrace.

"Please, Zeena," he begged. "Listen to me. I want to marry you."

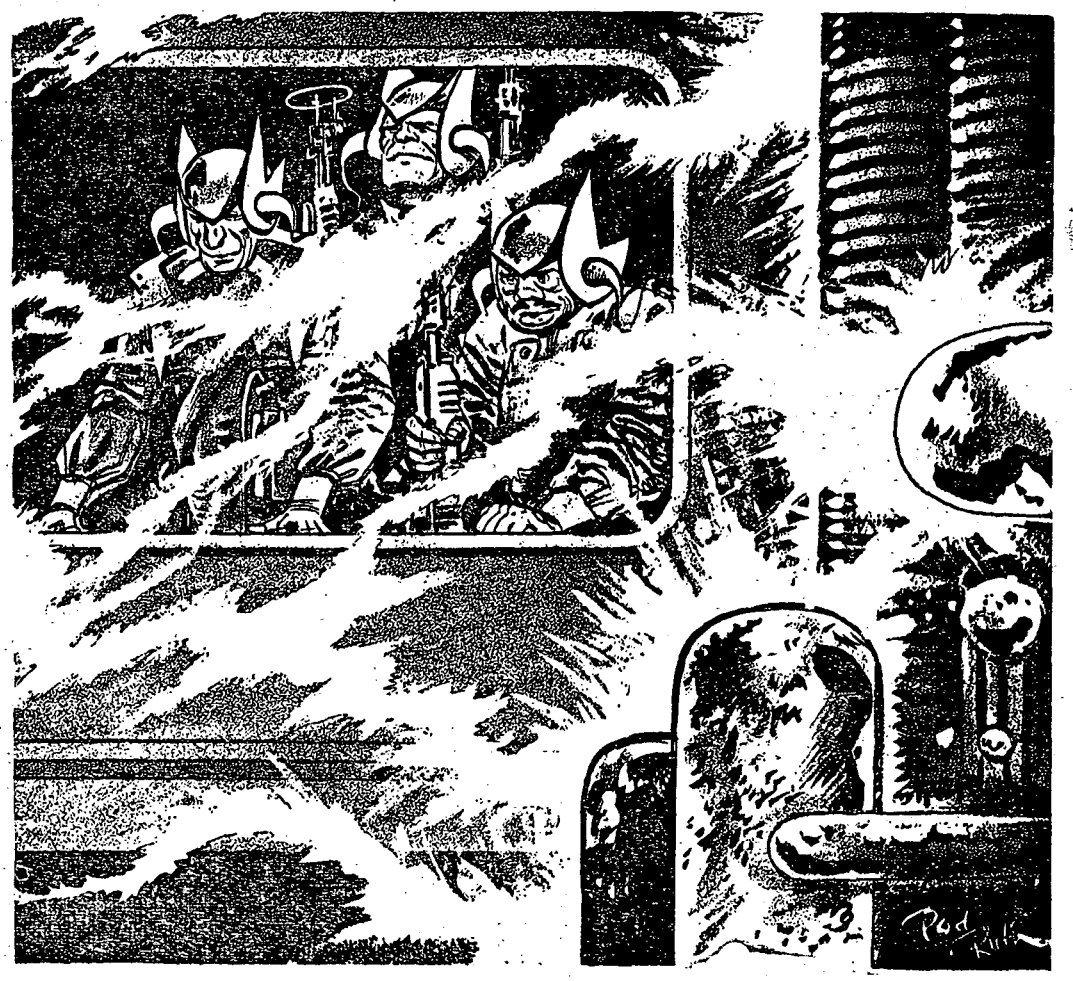
Again there was the whirring and clicking: "You will please fill out form Ztn-6748, the Form of Intent. Do not write in the lines, a, 3, 14, b-6 and b-9. Having filled out form..."

But she was gone—

Not even the sound of her footsteps.

"...Ask for Requisition number... fill out Form...use Form...get Requisition number—"

He walked the silent halls of the Museum of the Past. The halls with-



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out end, the musty halls. And suddenly something in an alcove caught his eye. It was still there, the exhibit of a past, the gaudy, glass-topped pinball machine. He slipped a coin into the slot and immediately after a metal ball slid down into the narrow funnel. The machine lit up on the inside and a colored sign glowed at the top. There it was, the name of the game. He blinked his eyes. It wasn't the game he had played as a child. 'Win The Girl' wasn't the name of the game, Nor had there been a picture of a girl in the corner.

It was Zeena! His Zeena!

Her mouth formed silent words: "Win the girl. Try. . . ."

The ball sped up and out, struck against one of the rubber tips, caromed and struck another and a third, and finally came to rest in the slot at the bottom. But the numbers had flashed up on top and the bells had rung with each new number and he had scored twelve thousand points with his first ball. The jackpot was sixty thousand. He remembered again how he had gentled the ball up through the funnel so that it did not rebound too swiftly from the rubber tips. It was as if he were a child again.

The numbers flashed on top and the bells rang and the lights glowed and paled and soon it was the last ball and he still needed ten thousand points to win. To win Zeena!

He made it!

But now the bells had voices and the glowing numbers flashed so hard they hurt his eyes and there was a wild scream of sound: *Tilt! Tilt! Tiltiltiltilt. . . TILT!"*

"TILIT! Damn it, man! Open up."

Tilit Macamber sat up as if he had been jerked erect by invisible wires. He was drenched in sweat; the sheet was soaked in it. And what he had seemed to hear dimly, as from a distance, was now a roaring voice from beyond the closed door: "Tilit! Open up."

He slid from the bed, called, "All right. All right. Hold up for a second," and trotted to the door and swung it wide.

The lank, angular figure of Bill Woods was bent toward him. The side light showed the hollows and angles of the lean, chiseled face, and made deeper circles of the eye sockets so that the dark eyes of the other seemed unnaturally sunken.

"What the devil was happening in there, Tilit?" Woods demanded.

"Nightmare I guess," Tilit replied. He yawned, then smiled. "Come in, man. You look as if you'd seen a ghost. Or have a hangover from too many heterodols."

The other smiled and it lent an odd pensiveness to the otherwise austere features. "Scared the sanity out of me with your howling. That's the second time this week, Tilit."

Macamber frowned. "All right. So it's the second time. Maybe I like 'em."

Woods continued to smile and stepped into the room and closed the door after him. He kicked the single chair the room boasted, to where he could slide his lank frame into it and made his ease. He pulled a pack of cigarettes from a pocket and threw the pack at Macamber after he slid one of the white tubes out of it for himself. "Here. Smoke up and cool off. Real ones; Geoff Mitol slipped them to me. Got them from a Lower City worker."

Macamber took a slow breath and after a second or two smiled in answer. It was hard to be angry with Bill Woods, and Tilit Macamber knew there was nothing short of murder, Woods wouldn't do for him.

"Oh, hell, Bill!" he confessed. "Zeena again."

This time a frown worried new lines

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over the many on the wide forehead of Woods. "Zeena...?" He folded his arms and looked ceilingward. "What's got into you lately, Tilit? I don't like to advise or say I told you so, but this has got to stop."

"It's love," Tilit sighed. "Something even the Super Board of Super City can't stop, the emotional displacement of love. Not with all the forms they can devise."

"You'll get a P-ry-X," Woods said sharply.

"Purgatory X," Tilit Macamber said flatly. "The Hell they invented to replace the one they took from the Religionists of the past. Ha. No. The yellow card won't show for me. I haven't rebelled... Or are you trying to tell me of a new order I know nothing about?"

"It's an old one, Tilit. You've just forgotten it. Let me prick you with the pin on which you can hang. Psychosomatic symptoms: mental and emotional instability. Will not cooperate toward a balanced adjustment. Shows signs of a deep-seated rebellion against forms and regulations. Want more?"

"No!" Macamber drew a few savage puffs from the cigarette and smashed it to a shapeless pulp in the ashtray.

Woods withdrew his lank frame from the chair and stood erect, an ungainly, untidy giant, whose lined face bore the look of deep inner suffering. He took the three steps which separated them and put his arms around Macamber.

"My dear, muddle-headed friend! Ah. Muddle-headed yes, but not stupid. Forthright, courageous, real. Let someone put your foot in the right path and you're the kind of man who would break down the walls, tear the barriers apart." He sighed, and let his arms fall to his side. "Guess it's time to hit the sack. I hope it'll take only one pill tonight."

Macamber, who stood but an inch short of six feet, had to look up to search his friend's eyes. "Can't you cut them out? I heard from someone, I can't remember who, that the damn things are more than just sleeping pills. They've got a hypnotic in them."

"I think so, too. I also think they've wired my place..."

Macamber's voice trembled: "A reco-disc?"

"Yes. And it's obvious they would do that only if they've prepared for the taking of subconscious records. One of these days..." He finished on that dark note.

The door closed. It was as if it had closed forever on Woods. Macamber repressed an involuntary shudder and closed the light and crept into the damp bed again. He had the strangest thought as sleep came to close his eyes.

That he was the only man in Super City who was not a worm with arms and legs—

BUSBY GANTHAM drew his dark brows together and peered through his small, cold, animal-like eyes at the others around the table. His ugly, pocked face was completely devoid of movement. Then he spoke, and the illusion of emptiness of character was instantly dispelled.

"They are like worms. Worms with legs and arms, but worms, nevertheless. Or do we have other classifications?"

There were ten others seated about the table. Only Farringham and Neilson showed distress at the word, worm. Farringham's delicate features were screwed up as if he had tasted something overripe. And now he shuddered gently. But the white-haired man at the far end, Gregor Neilson, showed nothing more than a narrowing of his old eyes. Other than that, the benign face was placid as ever.

"Ah! I see Farringham dislikes my

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choice of expression. The truth can sometimes disgust. Remember that, my super-delicate friend. And what troubles the ancient Nielson?"

"What troubles me, Gantham, will soon trouble no longer. My race is about done. But yours still has a way to go. You're making the path hard for yourself. The men who planned and founded Super City, ninety-nine years ago, did not have your view in mind. Man is not a worm."

Gantham's thick shoulders heaved. "There is a single, indisputable fact we can agree on, I believe. Nothing stand still. There is no vacuum." He smiled. It was like a snarl. "They said the ones who planned and made the H-bombs and set them off did not reason from a correct hypothesis. They thought thousands of years must pass before the Earth would become habitable again. We know otherwise. And that was why they founded Super City and gathered the millions of people into it and planned its future. For the habitation of this planet at the proper time. Well, the time has come."

"The time for what?" Nielson asked softly.

Gantham tapped out his argument with a blunt finger: "They were right. A hundred years and Super City would need new resources. Our worms will be sent out to work the planet for us, while we sit here and take our rightful ease. Eleven of us, the rulers of Super City and who knows but that we are the rulers of a Universe."

"When I was young," Nielson said after the other had finished, "I worshipped the God of science with all the devout ardor of a religion. Now, that I am old, I find my Master is a cold and sterile God. Man is more worthy of the state he has fallen to. We made machines that man should have a rightful place in the sun. That the machine shall be the slave. But the machine has become the master. I will not serve this lifeless master. Ferrardi invented the machine which sends men to that place we call Purgatory X, and the first to go into the maw of that machine was Ferrardi himself. I plead to be the last."

"Another time, Nielson," Gantham said. "And as for you, Farringham, I dislike men of too fastidious a taste. Change it. The meeting is at end, gentlemen."

WHEN THE last of them had filed through the door Gantham pressed one of a series of buzzers at his right hand. Presently the door opened again and a woman stepped through. The shapeless grey uniform she wore made it impossible to say whether she had a good figure or bad, although she walked with a certain grace. He face was barren of make-up, of course, and her hair was piled in a prim and neat bun at the back. Her features were regular and her color rather pale. She carried a notebook in her right hand.

"I am Miss Zeena Norcross, sir," she announced. "Miss Swanson had her psychiatric this afternoon and the supervisor ordered me to take your dictation."

Gantham shook a limp hand toward a chair and the girl seated herself and prepared for dictation. Gantham paced the floor behind her, his stocky figure moving with slow, stolid strides.

"Memo to all department heads. The new Robo-clerk will be placed into active use the beginning of the new work week. All clerical workers will be replaced, thus eliminating a great deal of the inefficiency so prevalent. Memo to the..." he stopped at the look on the girl's face. "Something wrong, Norcross?"

"Robo-clerks, sir?" Her words were barely audible.

He waited for her to go on. She wasn't aware of his suddenly studying glance, nor of the light which came from hiding deep in his eyes.

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"...But won't that put several thousand clerks out of work?"

"I imagine. They'll be reclassified."

"But, sir, I'm from Records and Reclassification. There is nothing for them, unless they're reclassified Lower City."

"Something we can't help."

Her eyes were wide now, and color had suddenly come into her face, making it more human and prettier, and her breast heaved in agitation, as if she felt strongly about these unknowns. "They will lose their rights, sir."

Gantham snorted from behind her. She turned and noticed his eyes for the first time, and saw they were peering into the narrow opening of the V of her blouse. One hand strayed up and clutched it closed. His eyes continued to concentrate on the spot, as if he could still visualize the smooth cream of the skin he had seen, and the soft swell of the breasts.

Suddenly his hand was on her shoulder, turning her toward him, and seconds later his free hand was pawing clumsily at the flesh beneath the bodice of her slip, while she struggled furiously and silently.

And suddenly a light glowed a deep green from the center of the table and a voice that was without character intoned: "A meeting of the Council has been called as per the orders of Chairman Gantham. The meeting is at fourteen hours..."

He looked up at the words, away from the girl, and his eyes became more sane. He whirled her to one side, and although she stumbled slightly, she managed to retain her balance. Her fingers rushed to the undone hooks while silent sobs wracked her.

"Tell your super," he said, "that as of this afternoon you will replace Swanson."

The panic in her heart was to be seen on her face, as she stepped quickly from the room.

HE HAD BEGUN to wonder if they hadn't made a mistake. Zeena should have been out an hour ago. It was almost thirteen hours now. Now and then a straggler came from the marble-faced building which housed the central committee, but there were long waits in between. But his wait was not in vain.

She came striding down the steps with an unnatural haste, and for the first time he saw her eyes light up at sight of him. And he was also quick to note how fast her breath came and that her fingers trembled slightly as they took hold of his arm.

"Oh, Tilit! Let's get away from the city. Fast as we can."

He gave her a quick glance of wonder, saw she was in a state bordering terror and moved swiftly and silently toward the tube station where they would catch the mon-cars for the parks at the edge of Super City.

Several groups of children, under the supervision of a number of specialists, were moving toward a playground to be seen in the distance. But Tilit and the girl were bent in another direction, where there were trees and flowers and some level grassland on a small flat hill.

They were alone.

He took her hand and looked up into her eyes, trying to peer below the downcast lids. "Anything wrong?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Oh. You're more quiet than usual. I thought there might be something..."

"Will you marry me, Tilit? To-day?"

He dropped her hand as if it had suddenly caught fire. "To-today," he stuttered, then recovered, and went on in an oddly derisive tone. "But darling. There are forms, and requisitions."

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"You're not being fair, Tilit."

"I suppose not. But I keep remembering the numberless times in the past when *I* asked the same question, and how I was put off. Why, now and today? Won't tomorrow do? You know the registration boards are closed and it will take two days of psychiatric examinations, my dear."

"We can get a waiver," she said.

He looked at her with stunned surprise. A waiver meant that their progeny would belong to the State, and that they would have to be reclassified with a probable lowering of their quantitative number. Even as low as to the Lower City, perhaps.

"Something happened today. Tell me about it!"

She did and when she was done, buried her face in her hands and sobbed long and helplessly.

He took her hands away and clasped her close, whispering gentle things, until finally she regained a measure of control. But while he stroked and calmed her his mind was busy.

So that was it, he thought. She wanted him to marry her because she was frightened and a man had sought her with lust and touched her virtue with passion. It wasn't that she loved, or even felt particularly drawn to him. Just protection and fear. Well, he was no less a man, with lust and passion as great as the other's. And he desired her physical love, not this shabby garment she was offering. She was beautiful to him, and like something made of stone, untouchable. And would even chance Lower City to retain her garment of virginity.

"I had another of my dreams," he said idly, not looking at her. "You've always psychoanalyzed them before." He told her the dream.

Now her face bore the look of concentration he was so familiar with. "Of course the Robo-clerks did not belong in the Museum of the Past," she said. "But they did have a place and meaning. Simply, Tilit, the dream was your sub-conscious desire to get away from all the rules and regulations that torment you."

"And what was your place in the dream?" he asked.

"You've always wanted to marry me, and I've always told you there were forms and requisitions to be filed."

"And the pinball machine...?"

"That I don't understand."

"I think I do. The pinball machine made everything clear. I won you at the end of the dream, yet I couldn't get you. The pinball machine showed *tilt*. No matter how we try, the machine is not made to be beaten. Do you think marrying me will make Gantham's lust for you lessen. It will probably grow greater. He is the head of the State, and I'm sure can send me any place he likes, even to Purgatory X, if he wants to. Don't marry me because you're frightened. Marry me because you love me."

"Love!" She laughed, and the harshness of the sudden sound startled him. "You've always thrown the word at me, Tilit, as if it were a wonder-coated needle that was supposed to penetrate my invulnerability and change me, somehow. I'm a machine, too. A woman-machine that works in Records and Reclassification. The last machine that handles the yellow cards, those little squares of paper bearing the quantitative and qualitative serial numbers, and at the bottom, in the right hand corner, the letters, P-ry-X. And when I feed the card to the machine I work at there is nothing left of what was once a man or woman. Only a memory; a memory that will soon fade."

SO THAT was where she worked. She had never told him. He understood her a little more, now. And knew, also, that below the shell of

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hardness there was a woman who was meant to be loved, a woman who needed tenderness.

She went on, "Like the memory of someone you may know. A man named Wood, from your dormitory."

His mind went blank and numb with shock. Not Bill Wood! Not Bill Wood... "Damn them!" he growled thickly. "Why? When did it happen?"

"This morning. The crime is listed, of course. Treason. Open rebellion and inciting to open rebellion, against the State. He was betrayed by a recodisc in his room. Hypnotic, sleep-inducing hetterodol pills were used. He tried to incite the workers of Lower City."

"When, Zeena? When do they exterminate him?"

"He is already a memory."

Suddenly he was crying. He lay face down on the damp earth and cried with wracking, tortured sounds. She sat up straight, on her face a look of helplessness, as if something had happened over which she had no control, for which she had no power for help. She had never seen a man cry, had never imagined a man could feel so deeply about another. And for the first time a crack broke the cold logic that was the shell of her heart. Tenderly and gently her hands stroked his hair and after a while he sat up.

He wiped the tear stains from his face with the backs of his hands. "I admired Bill," he said. "Funny. He had the guts of a million men and the gentleness of a million women. But it was there all the time. The look of a man who was going to be a martyr. I swear it, Zeena. Bill didn't die in vain!"

"Hush. Don't talk like a fool. There isn't anything you can do."

He got to his feet, pulled her along with him. "Come on. Let's walk. There's an agony in me that's got to get out. Well, it's too late to help Bill. But wherever he is he'll be glad to hear this. I know the path, now, and the walls and barriers. I'll bust them, Bill."

She looked at him, as they walked, amazed at the transformation in his face, the stony glint to the eyes, the hard, stubborn set to the chin, the sudden mask of steel he had placed over his features.

"...I prattled of love for a very long time. It was all that was on my mind. Well, I still love you, but it will have to wait. There are more important things."

"Don't be a fool," she warned him sharply. "You can't do anything. You're one against..."

"A world?" he laughed shortly. "Who wants to be in this kind of a world? I'll make a better one, or die trying."

"It's Purgatory X, Tilit! Don't you understand? Nothingness, the place of no return, the emptiness of-of, terror."

"Not for me. I never believed before. Now I am sure of it. Fear and hate, those are the words they rule with. I hate, but I'm no longer frightened."

"All right. So you're not frightened. But what can you do?"

"I don't know. I'll have to give it thought. Bill went to Lower City. They must be ripe there. If they stop working and rebel all the machinery of Super City stops. But first I want to plan clearly and well."

They were on the path leading to the tube station. The arch to one of the paths leading into the park was passed. People were streaming homeward and there was a large crowd clogging the gate to the station. Tilit drew the girl to one side.

"You can help me, Zeena."

"How?"

"Change my classification. Put me on Security Patrol. I'll be able to work better there."

"I don't know. Please. Give me a

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little time, Tilit."

He smiled grimly. "As much as you want. Eternity..."

Her head fell at the words and they walked into the station without another word.

HE SNAPPED the light on and stepped to the chest in which he kept the few extra shirts he had. Suddenly he sniffed at the air. There was a strange odor, as if of sweat, a stranger's sweat. Immediately a bell rang in his mind.

The Security Police.

He moved to the window and peered down into the street from behind the protection of the wall. Sure enough. Two of the dark-uniformed Security men were coming toward the dormitory. He whirled and ran for the chest again. The last drawer. Ah! They hadn't taken it. The cold steel of the pistol butt felt good in his palm. At least he'd go down fighting, and taking as many of them as he could.

There was a knock at the door. He called for them to come in.

They stood on the threshold, two of them, thick-bodied, flat-faced, cold-eyed.

"Tilit Macamber...?" one of them asked.

"Yes," Macamber replied. The gun lay snugly below the waistband of his trousers.

"Come along."

There was a car parked at the corner with a man behind the wheel. Tilit and the two Security men sat in the rear. It wasn't a long drive. The Security Building, a wide, low structure of dark stone, was only a few blocks from Macamber's dormitory.

The silence of the place was the first thing Macamber noticed as he walked between the uniformed men. Then, the feeling of terror. And last, the utter hopelessness of the trap. The building was full of these men, armed strong-men, all of them only too ready to use the rubber truncheons at their sides, or their fists, and as a last resort, their guns, with the horrible air pellets.

They walked down a long and silent hall and came at the end to a plain-faced door. One of the guards nudged Macamber with his elbow. "In there."

He was an officer of some kind. Frameless glasses perched on a thin, bent nose, pale eyes lowered to a report, sliver-thin mouth, nervous hands fiddling with paper.

One of the guards cleared his throat and the officer looked up. "Yes?"

"The prisoner, sir. Tilit Macamber."

"Ah. Yes. Macamber, we've just received the psychiatric examination of the reco-disc placed in your room. Not favorable at all."

"And...?" It was wonderful, this feeling of be-damned-to-you Macamber felt.

"Reassignment. Lower City."

Macamber felt his jaw drop. Was that all?

A bell tinkled close at hand and the officer looked away from the man before him and picked up the head set and listened in a stony silence for several seconds. Whoever it was spoke with incisive vigor because the three men on the opposite side of the desk could catch the strident sound, although nothing of words.

"Very well, sir," the officer said at last. "I have him here. We had a reco-disc in his room. Yes, Chairman Gantham. Immediately!"

Gantham! What the devil had he to do with Gantham, Macamber wondered? And it dawned on him. Zeena had gone to Gantham and had told him she was going to marry Tilit and had no doubt asked for a transfer.

The officer was eyeing him with cold indifference. "It seems your sins were greater than we thought. H'mm. Well, take him away. Purgatory

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X..."

Macamber leaned forward and gripped the edge of the desk. "Why?"

THE OFFICER didn't answer. His eyes went past Macamber to the two Security men. Suddenly a sledge-hammer fist took Macamber in the small of the back, and an instant later another caught him in the kidney. Pain was a crimson tide threatening to engulf him. Like a lashing whip his hand shot toward his belly. When it came up the gun was in it and he was whirling away from the desk. The blankness of the officer's face was suddenly punctuated by a black hole between the eyes. There were two more ringing shots and the room was suddenly empty of enemies.

"Three," Macamber grunted aloud. The pain was going away, and with it the dizziness. "Three more shells. But someone must have heard the sound of firing. Better get out of here."

The corridor was no longer empty. At the far end, Macamber saw a number of the dark uniforms running toward him. And from another direction three men shot out into the main corridor. There was a stairway to his right.

He was going up, four steps at a time. Bells were clanging the alarm, and he could hear the pound of feet and the shouts of voices in pursuit. Up again and to the fourth floor. As he got to the head of the stairs on the fourth floor a uniformed ugly appeared, as if by magic. Once more the pistol in his hand spoke and the other tumbled past him and rolled down the stairs to the turn. But Macamber was no longer interested. The way was clear now.

There was a passageway straight ahead of him. He turned his head left and right, saw that already the pursuers were starting to boil up from other stairways. Like a shot he was across the ten feet of open space and into the darkness of the passageway. Now he ran lightly, carefully. It was dark.

Then it was no longer dark.

He whirled, shot twice into the group coming at him and ran straight for the door at the end of the passsage. And as he opened the door and closed it shut behind him, he had time to wonder at their laughter, sudden and explosive, before a vast sheet of blinding light tore his reason to shreds. He had time only to notice the coiled tubes which lined the walls from top to bottom, and the strange humming sound.

The reason for their laughter was suddenly plain to him.

They had chased him into the very room from whence people were sent into Purgatory X. He had wondered why they hadn't used their weapons when he was in range once or twice. There had been no other place for him to go but *that* room—

Now all was peace.

But not for long. As if a giant hand had been set into action, he felt steel-like fingers grab hold, felt himself being squeezed, and knew a last terror-stricken instant, the last awareness of life. Then he was being whisked into the great mystery on huge wings....

DARKNESS.

But only at first. His eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom and he saw a pinpoint of light in the distance. Damp breeze. The frightening reality of knowing he was alone. The conscious terror of *Death!*

But he was alive!

He got to his feet slowly, taking care as he did. Here, in the immediate present, it was dark, and he didn't know where he was. He stood erect. The light, humid wind stirred a lock of fallen hair against his forehead. That light ahead. An opening. He moved toward it with reluctant steps,

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slowly, yet with hope.

He looked down the gentle slope of a shallow valley. He was standing within the mouth of a cave. Ahead, in the near distance, the curving whiteness of a road lost itself around the flank of a hill. A road? But roads did not come of themselves. Someone built them.

He became aware of light all about him, a light he had never seen before; the light from a sun. For Super City lay deep within the earth and knew only the artificial creation of light. Macamber looked about him with wonder-filled eyes. Fleecy clouds floated in an azure sky, a soft though invigorating breeze stirred the foliage of the trees and made the gayly colored flowers nod and bend.

Then his eyes went back to the road and his feet followed their direction. And soon he was walking squarely down the center of it. He was almost at the bend of it by the side of the hill when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. He waited for the other to come into sight. And though his heart was beating wildly not a sign of the inner turmoil showed on his lean, strong face.

It was a man. The very clothes of the stranger would have given pause to Macamber in any circumstance. The man was dressed in a sort of tunic, or gown. It clung close about the throat and fell in many folds to sweep around the ankles in loose motion that was oddly pleasing to the eye. The tunic was of a white material and purple edging was the only color contrast.

It was hard to guess the stranger's age, for though he was smooth shaven there was an aura of age about him. Yet Macamber couldn't put his finger on what gave him that impression. The stranger stopped also at sight of Macamber. Then a smile broke on the man's lips and he came on again. Not Macamber. He stood still.

"From Super City, I see," the man said.

Macamber's eyes went wide.

"Well, continue along this road. Crystal City is but a short distance off. You will see friends soon."

The stranger started to pass Macamber but stopped again when Macamber said, "Crystal City? But isn't this Purgatory X?"

"Only in your mind," the other replied. Once more he smiled. Macamber was aware of its friendliness. "Don't be frightened. All of you come to us in the cave. We used to wait but that frightened you even more. And soon enough you see the road and after..."

"We use it and come to Crystal City," Macamber said.

"Very right."

"Then I won't be the exception. Thank you, sir."

The other nodded gravely and moved on. Macamber stood looking at the rather graceful walk of the stranger for a moment, then turned and made the bend in the road.

IT WAS the most fabulous city he had ever seen. A city of towering crystal. Domes, cubes, rectangles, and triangles, all of crystal and all reaching toward the sky with tender, searching fingers.

Not too far ahead of him.

He passed a number of signs but gave them little heed. One caught his eye and he stopped sharp in amazement. The sign said, simply, "To those of Super City: Ferrardi and Company may be found in the Inn of the Seven Wise Men. Come one, come all."

A whistling sound made him turn. A strange vehicle was coming down the road. It gleamed with a high shine, yet was black and lustrous. He gauged its length at about ten feet and its diameter at about four. Quite suddenly it stopped and a door swung

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open along the entire length and a voice came to Macamber:

"Lift?"

It was another of the tuniced men. He was seated at the controls of the vehicle. And like the first, his age was also undetermined by visual factors, and also like the first, there was a gentle smile about the lips.

"Thank you," Macamber said as he made himself secure in the only other seat alongside of the driver.

"Super City?" the driver asked as he pressed a plunger home.

"Yes. But how did you know?"

"Our only visitors. We've become quite accustomed to you people since Ferrardi first came among us. You've seen the directions we've placed at vantage points on the road?"

"Oh, yes."

"I'll drop you off. I pass the Inn."

Macamber filled his senses with the passing scene. But of it all he was most impressed with the people. The fact that the city's streets were wide and clean or that the architecture was strange and wondrous made less of an impression than the fact that he did not see a child who was not laughing, or a grown-up who was frowning, although he did see some who were more serious than others.

Abruptly the strange car stopped and the hinged door swung down though Macamber did not see the driver manipulate any lever. "There it is, my friend. Ferrardi will make you welcome."

There was a sign above the doorway but Macamber did not see it, nor did he pay too much attention to what the outside looked like. His concern was with the interior and Ferrardi, a name dimly remembered.

The Inn was full of men and women, talking, laughing, gesticulating, and all in all seeming happy. He stood on the threshold a second or two, just looking on. And suddenly a remembered voice shouted, "Tilit! Tilit Macamber, by all that's holy!"

It was Bill Woods.

THEY POUNDED each other's back, embraced, held each other apart, and embraced again. And all the time the words poured from them, each speaking at will so that nothing made sense and the only thing that mattered was that they were together again.

It was Woods who finally brought them to the present. "Come along with me to meet Ferrardi. The grandest guy you'll ever meet and the reason for your being here."

He was the central figure in the huge group about an immense table. Macamber knew Ferrardi must have been in his sixties at this time, yet no matter how Macamber's eyes pried he could see no visible sign of age. Ferrardi looked thirty. He was a thickset man with a wide, earthy face, arranged pleasantly in all its features, and as an exclamation point to the arrangement, a short beard of the Imperial type adorned the chin.

"Welcome," Ferrardi smiled and nodded abruptly. Macamber was to come to know the gesture well. "And I see you have already found an old friend. You will see and find more of them in time. Welcome to Crystal City, though you may think it is another place. As close to Heaven, however, as anything I know. Welcome."

The others echoed Ferrardi's shout of "welcome" and lifted their happy faces toward Macamber.

"Thank you," Macamber said.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw Woods' lean, angular face bent toward him. "Come along, you idiot, and tell me how you got mixed up enough to get sent here."

It did not take long.

"Well, all I can say is that you're well out of it," was Woods' comment.

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"Well out of it."

"I suppose so," Macamber said. But there was the serried look of a frown on his face.

Woods had taken the other to a table removed from the central one and now the two sat over cups of a sweet-flavored brew that was somewhat like coffee.

Woods noticed the beginning of the frown. "Uh, unh! This is a happy land. Can't have that here."

Macamber grinned. "I know. The first thing I noticed. But there's still. . . ."

"Oh, no!" Woods exploded. "Not Zeena. Don't say that."

"I have to."

"Well, then we'll have to see Ferrardi about this. Come on."

"YOU'RE new here, Macamber," Ferrardi pointed out. "But this I can tell you. You are free to do what you will, marry whom you please, be as happy as you wish. Good heavens! There are any number of women in Crystal City who can take this Zeena's place in your heart."

"I'm afraid not. Besides, I think she is in actual danger."

"H'mm! What kind?"

"Gantham, the Chairman of the Board, wants her."

"Gantham, eh?" Ferrardi grew introspective. His hand stole up to stroke the silky beard. "Again Gantham, always Gantham. A pity."

"That doesn't help, sir," Macamber said.

"What would you have me do?"

"They tell me you are responsible for the manufacture of the machine. I would like to return to Super City."

Silence fell. An awe-filled silence. They looked at Macamber as if he had suddenly gone mad. Go back to Super City. Surely he *was* mad.

"But why?" Ferrardi asked.

"For Zeena."

"I would say that love has been carried to excess in your case. Were she the very paragon of everything womanly, I would not want to return to that place of dismal beings, fear-filled and hate-filled."

It was all suddenly clear to Macamber then. Ferrardi had spoken the magic words.

"Can you build another machine, sir?" Macamber asked.

"That would be simple enough. But the reason for building it would have to be greater and more urgent than the one you've given, though I admire your gallantry."

"Then I would like to return to make clear to people that there is nothing to fear in Purgatory X, that their most urgent desire should be to gain entry to the machine which sends them here."

A pensive smile broke on Ferrardi's lips. His eyes sparkled at the thought behind them. "I like that. Yes. Dispel the fear and you break their chains. Of course there is still death. Gantham could *kill* them. . . ."

"Not if he never knew why they wanted to go to Purgatory X," Macamber pointed out.

It was Bill Woods who decided the issue.

"I'd like to go along, sir," he said. "I have a score to settle with Gantham, also."

"So have we all," Ferrardi said. "Nor I the least. Well, the more I think of it, the more I see of it. I believe you, too, will see what I do, after you get there. Very well. I will seek permission." He held up his hand to quiet their sudden outburst of joy at his agreement. "Let us keep in mind that we are on another plane in the same time interval as the Earth. I broke through that plane. I may not be able to return. However—"

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THE MACHINE was finished in amazingly swift time, though to Macamber, champing in impatience, years had passed since it was begun. Ferrardi was quite proud of it. It stood on a grassy plain and the whole population of Crystal City had turned out to watch Bill Woods and Tilit Macamber step into it.

"This one is different in some essentials from the one in Super City," Ferrardi said. He patted the cold metal side in affection. "There are two compartments in this one. One does the transmitting and the other the receiving. H'mmm! Yes, it is an improvement. Well, gentlemen, are you prepared for the return trip?"

They smiled and he answered gravely. "I did not think to see the day anyone would want to return. Well, go and come back quickly. We shall be anxious until we see you again."

The two men stepped inside the door and stood close together, gripping each other's hand. The tubes and coils glowed, and each felt again the giant grip and the sudden feel of winged uplift, and last, the utter peace of nothingness.

Ferrardi had calculated to a nicety where they wanted to land. The dim fastness of Lower City greeted their awakening. Woods said he knew where they would find safety among the workers. They opened their eyes and senses to find themselves in a small parkland.

"Back to the real Purgatory," Woods said drily.

"But not for long," Macamber said mysteriously. "Not for long."

The familiar sight of a Security patrol kept them silent until the patrol passed.

"I came along," Woods went on, "because I wanted to help. But I can't see how we're going to get all the people into the machine. There must be a million in Super City alone. And what of the *millions* here?"

"Who said anything about taking them anywhere?" Macamber asked drily.

Woods' eyes went wide in startled comprehension. "I *am* stupid! Of course. What made you think of it, Tilit?"

"What was pointed out to me from the very beginning. The difference between Crystal City and this place is a laugh."

"What a way to rebel. What a way to tear the walls down! I once said you'd do it if they put your feet on the right path." Woods squeezed the other's shoulder in rough affection.

"The one you've always derided. Zeena." Macamber did not say how unwittingly it was done. "But let's get to work. You know people, the right ones, down here. I'll work from above. It's fifteen hours now, time for the office people to get out. I'll station myself where Zeena will see me. Shall we meet in East Park in the morning?"

"Right. Just past the arch."

HIS HEART leaped at sight of her. Then he tumbled at the look of despair in her face. He called her softly as she passed, and for an instant thought she hadn't heard.

"...Zeena. It's me, Tilit...."

One foot was lifted in a half step. She did not turn, but let the foot descend all the way. He could see her stiffen, see her head come up. He moved softly to her side and said, "Don't be frightened. It isn't a ghost."

She turned and he saw then the tear drops gathering. She did not cry aloud, but rather without sound, without visible emotion. Just the tears gathering and falling. But there were stars in her eyes, and the most tremulous smile he had ever seen.

"Tilit...My love."

He took her arm and steered her

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down a side street, away from the huge square where the building of the Minstries were, like monoliths of doom. They walked so in silence until the street was empty of people and they were quite alone. And finally they came to a spot where there was a bench.

For a long moment he held her close, not saying anything, or even touching her in any way. There was a deeper, truer love in not doing. "I've waited a long time to hear that from you," he said at last.

"It was a long time in coming. Why did I know of it only when you were gone?"

He didn't answer.

She went on. "I guess it had to be that way. Now tell me. What happened? Gantham told me he had you sent to Purgatory X. He lied."

"No he didn't. I was sent there. It's not Purgatory at all! This is the real purgatory—and I've come back to change it. Now tell me, Zeena darling, has it been bad since I've been gone?"

"Gantham has been very busy. I think he has plans for doing something of great importance. It's no good, whatever he has in mind. No," she stopped his words by putting soft fingers against his mouth. "He hasn't touched me since that first day. But I feel his eyes, and I cringe when he comes close. But so far he's been too busy, as I said."

Macamber looked off into personal distances. "Zeena. Do you sit in on their meetings?"

"Yes. The last two, anyway."

"Are there Board members who hate Gantham?"

"Gregor Nielson and Farringham. Farringham fears more than he hates. But the old man fears no one and nothing. Sometimes he taunts Gantham, but Gantham treats him with contempt, and even worse, does not listen to him."

"Good! Can you get Nielson's ear? Tell him I would like to meet with him somewhere, that I have come back, and that I have great news for him from Ferrardi. Do you think you could manage that?"

"I think so."

"Tomorrow?"

"Tonight, if you wish! I have Nielson's audio number."

"Wonderful! Would you like to come along?"

"I just want to be wherever you are."

He kissed her then. It was the first time.

THE OLD man's eyes sparkled with a look of sudden youth.

"Wonderful!" he crowed. "Wonderful! Now I understand why Ferrardi went into the machine with a smile. How wise and clever he was. But what you plan doing... To conquer fear and hate. Think of it. The very fear in which we have lived for so long under Gantham to be ended. Yes, Macamber, I will help. If only to see Gantham overthrown."

Zeena squeezed herself close to Macamber's side. They were in the old man's quarters where they had gone after calling him. He had wanted them to come immediately.

"I thought I was in Heaven," Macamber said. "And I realized for the first time that what made Crystal City a Heaven was that people laughed and were happy there. But why go there? We can have it here."

"Yes, yes! Right here," Nielson said. "Now let me see. This Woods person is in Lower City. You say he can handle them. Super City will take a different technique. Let me think a moment."

He slapped his palms together with an abrupt gesture. "I have it. Fight fear with fear. This will take a little longer perhaps, but will be the least dangerous. I want you to appear

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at the next meeting. Tomorrow afternoon. Zeena will pass in. I will give you whatever leads you'll need."

Macamber nodded in agreement.

"As for tonight, stay here and keep an old man company. Both of you."

"I'll be reported," Zeena objected.

"Certainly. It's what we want. No more fear, of anything."

"I can hardly wait," Zeena said, "to see Gantham's face when he sees I don't care about the report."

"IT IS a fortunate thing I am concerned about this," Gantham said. "Don't let it happen again, Norcross."

Zeena smiled. "Why not? I rather liked it. The first freedom I've ever had."

"It will be the last," Gantham promised. "Do not think you can trifle with me. The Machine has taken more important people than you."

This time she laughed aloud. "Oh, pooh! Your old machine. I think the rest of the Board are waiting for you...".

He stood and came close to her. There was admiration in his eyes. and his hand suddenly stroked her arm. She quivered and moved back a step.

"I like you, Norcross. You have spirit. Not a wooden thing like the others. But don't try me too hard."

She said nothing but her eyes and mouth were set and thoughtful.

Gantham called the meeting to order. His brusque notice of old business set the stage for what he had in mind, to tell the Board that he was prepared to begin the first stage of discovery of what lay beyond Super City. He didn't get to it. Gregor Nielson called for attention, first. Gantham frowned, as though the angry glance should have proved warning enough. But the bland face showed no signs of having seen the look.

"Gentlemen, I have strange news for you. There was laughter in Lower City today."

They looked at the old man as if he had gone mad.

He went on: "The first time in the history of man. I let the news out on the telescreens in all public places. Thought it warranted attention. Something else, too. I'm a bit tired of our Chairman's desire for personal glory. I think we, as a group, should repress him somewhat."

They knew he was mad, now. All but Farringham. Nielson had briefed him quickly.

"I second the speaker's motion," Farringham said. And for the first time returned Gantham's stare with equanimity.

"It is interesting to note," Gantham spoke easily, without visible sign of anger, "that our colleague has taken attention to the fact that he is no longer of public use. It will be a matter of safety, for all in Super City, that he be sent to Purgatory X, as it is called. The place from which no one returns."

"Oh. I forgot," Neilson broke in. "There was another matter I thought the public should know of. It concerns a Tilit Macamber. Would you like me to continue?"

GANTHAM HAD gone pale at the mention of the name. His mouth was a pale line of anger and his eyes promised a quick doom to the old man. But he said nothing.

"I spoke to Macamber last night...."

"You're crazy," Gantham did break in this time. "I had his yellow card sent down. He is dead."

"Why is he dead?"

"He was an enemy of the State. That is why he died. That's why they all die."

"All? No matter. It's true, isn't it, that Macamber was placed in the machine, or rather, driven into it, be-

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cause you lusted for Zeena Norcross your personal secretary, and his loved one?"

"I won't answer any charge as ridiculous as that. Further, I am calling for a patrol to have you removed." His finger pressed at the buzzer close to hand.

The door opened, and without turning, Gantham said, "Summon a guard, Norcross. Immediately!"

"Why?"

The voice made him whirl. Gantham had never seen Macamber, yet he had no doubts that this man standing now at the closed door was he.

"Why?" Macamber said. "To have him sent to Purgatory X? But he isn't afraid. When you take the fear of Hell away from a man, he can no longer be held in bondage. I don't think anyone will be afraid, after tonight." He moved forward until he was standing at the old man's side. "But let me introduce myself. I am Tilit Macamber, late of Purgatory X. Don't be frightened. I assure you I'm no ghost. I have a message for you all. From Ferrardi, your old friend. He says that he is becoming angry with the number of people you are sending across the void. And that he is going to send them back, armed however, in case they might not find welcome here. Gentlemen! Think a moment. The worst rebels you can conceive of, all arriving together, and armed. Not a pleasant thought, is it?"

"This man is lying!" Gantham shouted. "He was never there."

But Tilit was prepared. The first thing he had Zeena do was get his yellow card. As Gantham's personal secretary she had managed it before reporting to his office. She had passed it to him when Gantham rang for her. Now he showed it all around.

"My passport, gentlemen! Now listen to me! All these years you have lived with fear, slept with it, ate with it. Purgatory X. The yellow card. No one knew when their turn would come. The device of this man to keep you, and a whole city, under his thumb. I just lifted the thumb for you. Would you like to lift the whole hand?"

There wasn't a sound. It wasn't necessary.

There was a strange and terrible smile on Gantham's lips. He stood up, shoved his chair backward, and said: "I'm not afraid. Not of you, or Purgatory X. Now what?"

"I suggest, gentlemen," Macamber went on, as if Gantham had said nothing, "that since the power of doing is in your collective hands, the first step is to abolish, first, Gantham, then the machine and the vicious system built around it...."

There were vigorous nods of agreement.

"...Let the telescreens broadcast the news immediately. After the news of Gantham's arrest."

Thick-bodied as Gantham was, he moved with cat-like swiftness. Whirling, he shot to the door, opened it and ran through.

"Order his arrest!" Macamber bellowed as he gave chase.

THE CHASE had gone on all day but Gantham had still not been apprehended by nightfall. Macamber had sent Zeena home and had gone out with a squad of Security men. Bill Woods joined them later. The entire day had passed and still no word of Gantham, not even a hint of where he could have gone.

Unaware that the chase had led in the direction of Zeena's dormitory Macamber became aware of it only when Bill Woods pointed it out.

"Look, Tilit! Why don't you go in and keep Zeena company? Gantham will be taken without your help. Go on, now!"

Macamber smiled and agreed.

The halls of the dormitory were

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silent; it was quite late. He approached Zeena's room on tip-toe, hoping she was still awake. He placed his ear to the door and listened. His eyes went wide and strained at what he heard.

Strange animal sounds, muffled sobs of terror, and then, Gantham's voice, broken and hoarse: "Now. Too late. I'll have you before I go out—"

Macamber took three steps backward, then lunged forward with all his power and weight. The door splintered open and he crashed through.

Gantham was bent over Zeena, whose clothing had been torn almost completely from her. He had a pistol in one hand and with the other was pinning the girl down. Purple bruises stained her face and a dribble of blood slipped from a corner of her mouth.

Before Gantham could do more than straighten, Macamber was on him. Gantham was heavier, stronger but less agile. He brought the gun up but Macamber chopped at the hand holding it and the pistol fell to the floor. But by chopping down at the gun Macamber had been forced to come in close. It was what the other wanted.

A growl of animal fury sounded deep in his throat as he got hold of Macamber's neck with his thick, stubby fingers.

A red haze floated up before Macamber's vision. He tried to tear the choking fingers from his neck, even tried to knee the other, but Gantham held him too close. The haze thickened. And it came to Macamber that this time he was going to die. He raked his clawed fingers down the other's cheeks, but Gantham only growled deeper. He sounded quite mad, now.

Tighter, tighter, as a noose grows tighter—

The sound of the pistol was like the popping of cork to Macamber. But the loosening of the grip on his throat, the return of life, of breath, was something he understood. He staggered backward, felt the touch of soft arms, the sound of a voice sobbing, "My darling. He tried to kill you..."

Now he could see.

Gantham lay in a pool of blood which poured from his mouth and ears. But he was still conscious. There was a light of triumph in his eyes. His lips opened and words came dimly to the man and woman:

"Not Purgatory X, anyhow..."

"No," Macamber said. "Not there. It's Hell where you're going..."

THE END

NEW OUTLOOK

★ **By Max Long** ★

DON'T EVER get the idea that nothing new can be invented! That old gag about "nothing new under the sun," is just a lie. To confirm that statement examine some of the new inventions which have come out and you'll be startled. A particular case of this is that old standbye, the circular saw.

If you've ever looked at a circular saw blade, you've noticed that it has a lot of small teeth set around a rim of a wheel and in action it chews its way through a piece of lumber like a beaver going through a log. In other words, you'd say that that was it; the circular saw was perfect for its job. But it isn't!

Somebody else has come up with a simple variation of the circular that worked infinitely better! All they did was to take a blade and instead of lots of little teeth, they put a small number of large teeth on it—sort of making a "chiseler" of it. The result is that this blade doesn't make one-tenth of the noise of a regular one, it cuts through wood many times faster, it doesn't make saw-dust, but shavings or chips, and generally speaking is better all the way around.

So the next time you examine some commonplace, everyday article, look at it with a critical eye; the chances are a hundred to one that it can be improved on in some way. And very often a golden rainbow awaits the improver!

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GUERRILLA TRAITOR!

★ By June Lurie ★

LIEUTENANT DEAN SMITH knew there was a traitor among them. He watched the half a hundred men, the remnant of his two hundred, wearily sprawled in attitudes of sleep or crouched in groups over the small fires taking the chill off the Mexican cave. One of them had betrayed the American guerrilla group last night. Only that could account for the beating they had taken from the Eastern Asians.

It would have worked so well, Dean thought. In his mind's eye he'd seen the Asian convoy moving tanks and electric trucks down the road, heading toward Dallas where the American line still stretched northward all the way across the States and Canada, the Rockies serving as a barrier to keep the Asian hordes contained in the western states they'd managed to invade. Then he recalled the murderous fire from behind that had engulfed his own men lining the road. It was a miracle that as many had escaped. Someone had betrayed the band of guerrillas to the Asian counterforces.

But who?—who among that weary battered crowd was a traitor?

"Tenente," Pablo, the Mexican scout interrupted his reverie. "The Asians—" Pablo spat "—are sending a convoy through Carana Pass tonight. It would be perfect for—" he ran a finger lightly across his throat.

"Good," Dean answered, "we'll give them a run, Pablo—but this time we can't stand another blow like last night's."

"I know," Pablo said sympathetically. "Someone talked."

In a short while Dean laid out the plan of the hypothetical attack to his weary men. Weapons were checked, ammunition loaded and stored aboard the few trucks they possessed, and then the men relaxed until zero hour.

Meanwhile Dean pondered his problem. It was obvious that the traitor of the group was using some radio equipment. Unfortunately Dean's unit had none at all. If he had it would have been a simple matter to track the betrayer down. Their last set had been lost in a truck the night before.

Yet Dean knew he had to find his man by radio.

"Pablo," Dean said after a while, "you can still move in the towns. I must have a receiver—even a home receiver will do if it has battery power and short wave—can you steal one?"

The Mexican grinned: "Tenente—give me three hours."

Dean glanced at his watch. There were eight hours left before they'd supposedly start to roll. "Just hurry, Pablo. Only luck—and a radio will let me get this rat."

Only a short while later the Mexican scout came back carrying an inconspicuous package. Dean took it from him in the little canvassed-off area he used as an office in the capacious cave. The set proved to be a small battery-powered portable with a short wave band. Hiding the package under his tunic, Dean left the cave. It was dark outside and it was a simple matter to operate the device from behind a cluster of bushes.

Dean swung the dial across the short-wave band. Patiently he monitored it, hoping that he'd hear some communication. After an hour he was about to give up in despair and disgust when he caught the clicking code: "Q-5—contact H—Q-5—contact H..."

He jumped with delight. This was it! He waited.

Back came the answer: "Q-5—ready—come in—come in—safe..."

Somebody outside the cave was ready to contact the Asians! Dean swung the simple loop of the antenna and found the maximum intensity. The discussion he heard was of no consequence. His traitor was giving the complete details of the attack.

Dean started to walk the imaginary line the receiver indicated. Through underbrush and rutted trail Dean stumbled along with Pablo at his heels. The latter's rifle was ready—and Dean's right hand never strayed far from his pistol.

Then abruptly they came on a small clearing. It was Post No. 3. Dean knew Striker, Lanning and Phillips as well as his own name. But there was no mistaking what the three were doing. Two were crouched over some apparatus, while the third kept a look-out.

"O.K. Pablo," Dean said softly.

The Mexican's rifle blasted rapid-fire, but at the same instant Dean tripped and his body nudged the Mexican for a moment. The shattering blast went wide. Instantly Striker's own weapon let loose and Dean felt an angry sting in his side. But the surprise was enough. Two of the traitors were down, bullet riddled.

Dean closed with Lanning. Fired by fury and hatred his arms moved like pistons smashing through the surprised traitor's guard. The traitor went down and before Dean could stop him Pablo put a bullet through the man's head.

Dean studied the portable transceiver. This would come in handy. And there'd be some changes made. The guerrilla attack wasn't going to be so nicely tabbed anymore. Happily he thought of tonight's carnage. The Asians wouldn't be able to take much more of this hammering...

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GROUND STERILIZING

★ By A. T. KEDZIE ★

WOULD YOU think that there'd be any sense in blasting a farm with fire and flame? Most people'd say an emphatic "no"! But they'd be wrong. A farmer has come up with an idea that promises to be a big help to farmers all over the world. Worse than the weather are the myriads of pests, diseases, soil troubles and what have you, which prevent the farmer from really utilizing his ground.

Consider the problem of a Southern California farmer who was raising potatoes. He discovered that his fields were infested with the black scab. It was impossible for him to grow a crop. He was poor and had to do something. Then it clicked in his mind and he tried a desperate remedy. "Why," he asked himself, "can't I sterilize the ground just like they sterilize medicinal instruments?" He answered himself —"for no reason!"

Then he started to move. He built himself a weird contraption of sheet metal, copper tubing, wheels, blower, burners and motor. He played this thing all over his fields except for just one strip.

He sprayed the ground with a flame of burning gas. Sulpher vapors were mixed with the gas and a plow-like attachment dug up the soil, turned it over, and literally blasted the pest out of the soil. The farmer planted his crop and waited for action. He got it. The crop came up perfectly—except on his test strip!

Now it is being done on a large scale. Farmers who have been bothered with terrible weed blights, with insect invasions, with strange biological pests, have tried out the machine or the equivelant. The results, while unorthodox and unscientific, have been startling.

Science has modified the apparatus, using such things as chemicals to enrich the soil and butane gas to provide the flame. The nitrogen producing organisms, so necessary to healthy soil seem unaffected. The system, in short, seems to be working. It is amusing to note that the man who investigated this phenomenon for the magazine *Popular Science*, did so at first sceptically. Then his eyes opened wide when he saw the results. This leads to a hopeful thought for interplanetary science. If it should be possible to visit, say Venus, it may be necessary to use similar sterilizing tactics on the soil in order to raise native crops. You can be sure that the matter will be considered. We're so near to stepping off this planet that any ideas of value, are being weighed carefully.

Micro-organisms of the dangerous variety have been thought to be one of the first enemies man will encounter when he sets foot on a planet in the Solar System capable of supporting any kind of life.

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READER'S PAGE

LOVELY. HE SAYS...

Dear Mr. Hamling:

This issue was fairly good as far as some of the stories go. I am giving you my rating of them:

1. "The Masters of Sleep"—lovely, lovely as is always the case with Hubbard.
2. "Lest Ye Be Judged"—very good and well written.
3. "Valiant Is the Word"—fairly good.
4. "Give the Devil His Due"—How such a thing ever got into FA is something that I will never know.
5. "The Handyman"—I have been under the impression that FA was an sf magazine and not a fairy-tale book!

Two things more: Like the fool that I am, I loaned my Wonder Story Annual to a friend. When I got it back, the heading and best story, "The Onslaught From Rigel", was gone. If anybody wishes to sell their copy, I will be glad to buy it.

Do any fans live near here? If so, I will be glad to correspond.

Lee Marshall
c/o General Delivery
Eunice, New Mexico

Glad you liked Hubbard's novel, Lee. We enjoyed it too.....Ed.

MISSED THE BOAT THIS TIME

Dear Ed:

My personal ratings for September issue:

1. "The Last Bounce", by Tenn.
2. "Detonator", by Sheldon.
3. "No Head for My Bier", by del Rey.
4. "The Ship Sails at Midnight", by Leiber.
5. "The Fifth Child", by Derleth.
6. "Warrior Queen of Mars", by Blade.
7. "Lorelei Street", by Browning.

"The Last Bounce" was very good. It was well written and even though it dealt a lot with human emotions it never became stuffy. The plot was original. That's what I liked the most.

"Detonator" was very good also. It contained intrigue that holds you fascinated every breath the hero takes.

"No Head for My Bier" was amusing even though not very scientific.

"The Ship Sails at Midnight" was fair, but only fair.

"The Fifth Child" seemed to be without any point to it.

"Warrior Queen of Mars" was strictly from hunger. It sounds like trash like that which used to be published in older magazines.

"Lorelei Street" was bad also. It was too vague and didn't seem to be going anywhere.

On the whole you have one of the best mags on the market. There's bound to be some bad stories in a magazine.

Neil Blum
2200 N. Kedzie
Chicago 47, Ill.

Sorry you didn't care for some of the stories, Neil. We hope this issue is more to your liking. We want to hit at least a hundred per cent!.....Ed.

HOLD THE LINE!...

Dear Mr. Editor:

Mr. William Tenn takes the prize for the best story in your September issue with his "The Last Bounce". Yipee! What a story. It had what is known as everything. Couldn't put it down long enough even to answer the telephone.

"Warrior Queen of Mars" places second. The title was too much like one I read before, but the story was quite different.

Liked that cover by Jones very much, but can't you do something about those inside illustrations?

Gerald Hibbs
Detroit Lakes, Minn.

We don't agree with you on the inside illos, Gerald. We think they by and large a good collection. And as to quality of artwork, we've yet to see a fantasy illustrator who has more on the ball—and few have as much—as Henry Sharp. Hank had two illos in the issue you mention.....Ed.

NOT DULL READING!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Congratulations on your October issue of FA. It is one of the best issues I have read for a long time. Especially good was Hubbard's "The Masters of Sleep". Usually long novels are rather dull, but Hubbard's was an exception. How about some more stories by him like "Final Blackout".

I rate your stories in the order: 1. "Valiant Is the Word", 2. "Give the Devil His Due", 3. "Lest Ye Be Judged", 4. "The Handyman". You could have made the first better, or rather I should say Hickey could have made it better by making it

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longer, but still it was O.K. The second one would have been better if it had been more serious, but it still was pretty good. "Lest Ye Be Judged" was sort of different from the rest, but still quite good. There was not enough to "The Handyman".

I have one more request to make, and that is to print some of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Martian and Venus stories. I think FA readers would really like him, at least I know I would.

Gary Clifton
Orchard, Nebraska

We don't know of any new, unpublished Burroughs stories, but we'll keep our eyes open.....Ed.

VARIETY FROM THE READERS

Dear Editor:

Don't you ever get whacky letters? You know the kind I mean. It takes talent to be a convincing screwball. One or two of this type would pep up your letter column, which seems a trifle vapid, to me. Of course, we don't want our Reader's Page to be one big rollicking madhouse, but an occasional dose of inane nonsense is desired, here and there. I remember reading a letter by Al Leverentz which actually made me guffaw.

Even semi-serious letters with just a dash of humor here and there are interesting. I suppose you deliberately don't print this type of letter to discourage the prospective humorist. Most of the prominent names in fandom must read your mag. Seldom do I see a well-known name in your columns. I have also noted that you have very few regulars. Bob Silverberg usually has a letter in your columns, but lately, even he has been slacking up.

Certainly no one wants the Reader's Page to turn into a playpen for a select few of readers. A wide variety of letters is best. After all, my first letter appeared in your mag. But I sincerely hope you do not make it a policy to neglect readers who have already had a letter published in your pages. Because if you do, I won't write you any more letters. So there!

In closing, I'll merely say I didn't like your October issue. I also would like to correspond with any guy or gal born about the same time, which was September, 1935. So howzabout typing me a letter, chums? I'll answer each one, or burst a few blood vessels doing almost that.

Earl Newlin, Jr.
103 Peck Avenue
San Antonio 10, Texas

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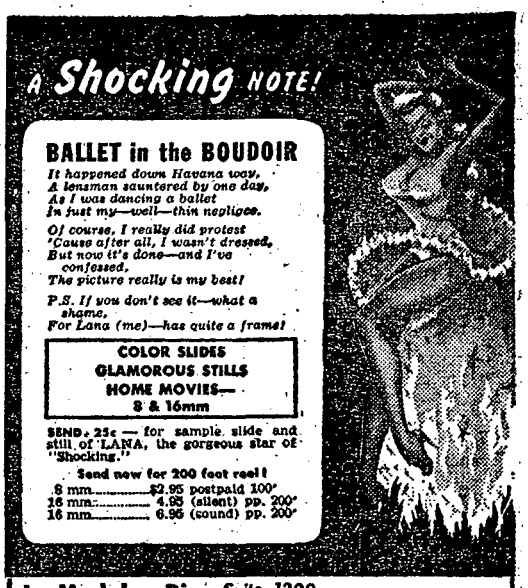

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your letters in early every month. And say, Earl, you mean to tell us you didn't like the Hubbard novel? Shades of dianetics! ..... Ed.

MORE FANTASY, PLEASE!

Dear Editor:

Ah, new authors—or are they pen names—and what authors! They're really good.. Dallas Ross' "Give the Devil His Due" was great. It wasn't unusual, but it *was* cute. I like cute stories. More by Ross, please. Now "Lest Ye Be Judged" by your other new author, to my knowledge, was definitely NEW. I guessed what Karl was going to do, but that didn't affect the novelty of the story any. More by Dryfoos, too.

"The Masters of Sleep" was very disappointing. I thought it was going to be good. It wasn't. Seemed more of a satire on psychologists than anything else. Bet it scared some of your more gullible readers half to death to think that such a noted man as L. Ron Hubbard is down on psychology. I guess dianetics will replace it someday, though—if it works. Don't take that opinion too seriously, though, 'cause I know absolutely nothing about the former.

Say, what we got 'ere? An example of unconscious telepathy of something. In Mort Paley's letter there is reference to "ghosts, or vampires, or beasties that go boomp in the night." In the next one, Brian McNaughton's, there are the following words: "I certainly have no objections to 'Ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged beasties that go bump in the night'." Perhaps it's just a coincidence though. Or more likely, being both teenagers and sharing like interests, the two guys correspond with one another and have had a similar phrasing in one of their letters which made an impression on both so that it came out in their letters to you.

Well, I don't mind beasties, and witches, and vampires and goblins, and things that go "bomp" or boomp" in the night either. Let's have more *fantasy* in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES!

The cover this issue was good.. The Jinn, or whatever it's supposed to be, really looks feenish.. The figures in the foreground don't look very realistic though.

Say, look here. AS has a fanzine review. Why can't FA have some kind of column interest to fans, too? I'm sure it would make the mag more popular among us.

Er, the cartoon wasn't so funny this time, you know. If you're going to put cartoons in that valuable editorial space, please make 'em worthwhile.

Well, I close with the usual statement: WE WANT A LONGER LETTER COLUMN!

P.S. I need fan fiction and features for the fanzine which I edit, MACABRE. Come on, folks!.

Tom Covington
315 Dawson Street
Wilmington, N. C.

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Heck, Tom, we thought that cartoon was a neat little job. As to the fantasy, we've got some top yarns coming up, and among them some terrific cover stories by top names in the field.....Ed.

RE: PRE-FRONTAL LOBOTOMY

Dear Sir:

I do not make a practice of writing letters of this sort to editors about their publications. However, I have just read the book length novel, "The Masters of Sleep", in your October issue. Some of the stuff in it is a little bit too raw even for a pulp to get away with. In the first place:

I am curious to know where one L. Ron Hubbard gets his information about neuro-surgery from....? He has most effectively given that branch of the medical profession a black eye in this story of his... and apparently with no good purpose, as far as the plot of the story is concerned. A critical portion of his plot revolved about the hero's pending pre-frontal lobotomy operation. And from the moment that this operation was mentioned, there was absolutely nothing good said about it. The reader is left after concluding the story with the feeling that *all* brain surgery is quackery of the worst order, and especially the type known as pre-frontal lobotomy.

Now, I think that this is definitely unfair of the author. He might just as well have conjured up some other term for the neuro-surgery in the story as to have used a term already applying to a medically accepted type of surgery.

It so happens that a little over 3 years ago I, myself, *had* a pre-frontal lobotomy in a hospital in Santa Monica, California. The effects of the surgery are precisely what the neuro-surgeon predicted; satisfactory. Mr. Hubbard's description of the after effects of the brain surgery are truly "fantastic" all right. But I think that he, or your magazine, should apologize for maligning the medical profession in the manner that appears in this aforementioned story.

N. R. Jackson
Pioneer Hotel
Las Vegas, Nevada

We certainly have no intention of casting aspersions on the Medical profession—and we're sure that Mr. Hubbard feels the same way. All of us owe medical science too much. However, for the purposes of the story, the operation mentioned was singled out by Mr. Hubbard, and we have it from him that the medical date in the novel is based upon actual fact. We certainly do not doubt Mr. Hubbard's integrity on this score, but by the same token, we regret the subject was not handled in a more delicate manner to eliminate any possibility of offense. For the latter part we apologize, but as for the subject itself, there seems to be quite a bit of controversy on it—as with numerous other techniques.....Ed.

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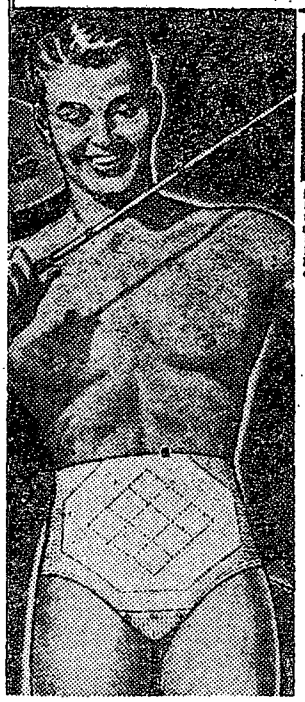

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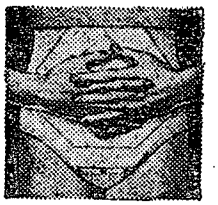

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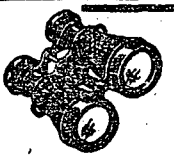

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WHERE'S THE CORPSE?

Dear Ed:

I would like to say to fan Newlin that I have been a reader of FA for seven years and stf in general for eight years.

I am now twenty-two and when I am seventy-two I'll have as much interest in it as I had when I started.

Regarding the stories I found what seems to me to be a mistaken idea.

"The Ship Sails at Midnight", where it was said, "...but you can't convict a man for the murder of a woman without real identity, when there is no body to prove a murder had been committed..."

I wish to point out to author Leiber that the matter of identity wouldn't alter the fact that she was killed.

I would also like to point out that the term, "Corpus Delecti" does not mean "the body in the case". but rather, "the body *of* the case".

In this case, I believe that there were ample witnesses to show that there was, indeed, a murder committed.

Henry E. J. Tyler
Fairbanks, Alaska

We think that the core of the matter lies in the fact that if a body is not evident, even though a crime is known to have been committed, murder cannot be proven without direct evidences: the corpus delecti you speak of.....Ed.

...SHE NEARLY BAKED A CAKE!

Hello again,

I haven't written many letters lately—not even to my family—because since I discovered horseracing I have delved deep into the subject, and what with "picking" them from day to day and keeping up a card file of the first four horses in every race, I find I've little time left to write letters!

But I feel I do owe you fellows a bit of comment from time to time, to let you know how this one minute segment of your fandom reacts to your efforts. So here I am, at last. (I can hear you groan, but bear up—it won't take forever, and anyhow, I've my daily horses to do the book-work on, you know. Can't get behind on *that!*)

Alexander Blade's "Warrior Queen of Mars" was interesting, and except for the fact that the end left me wondering just why the story was ever written, I did like it. Alexander *could* have used the background, etc. in a story with a real plot, however, depicting a struggle that is finally worked out, instead of making like a country lane that goes every which way and never actually *gets* any place. Maybe next time, huh?

"Detonator" by Walt Sheldon was top-notch. It gave me several cold shivers, and the whole result was worth noting, believe me!

"The Ship Sails at Midnight"—so what? The characterization, by Fritz Leiber, was

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marvelous, and the sensitive touch he utilized was the making of his story. But so much was not made clear that I'm still wondering about it. Oh, well, it made swell reading, and I'm the last to kick about that.

"The Last Bounce", by William Tenn—Now that is something to crow about. Personally, being a daughter of a Navy man as well as sister to one and wife of another, I deeply appreciate the significance of a story which brings out the military or service connection in space yarns of this type. If we ever reach space, the armed forces, we know, will be the pioneers, and it is a lot more believable when a story brings out a ship's discipline, and plays up the wonderful courage and intelligence of the men of tomorrow. Today we have the same thing in real life, on ships and in planes—tomorrow will be the mysterious vastness of space. So "The Last Bounce" and all its contemporaries have a corner on the market, for they are entering a new phase of literature (comparatively speaking) and only since the atom bomb the world is waking up.

Which brings me to interpolate here that teen-agers who read stf are not to be held lightly or belittled. Indeed, the young imaginative mind of today has before it vast vistas of imagination that one generation back it would have been shamed out of, while today all the world has had to face the awesome reality that life holds so many strange and unbelievable truths that it behooves us all to face and accept fantasy for what it really is—the "what-might-yet-be"! So for the young teeners who read stf, hats off! It will be the young of today that know strange new things their fathers never dreamed of, who will best face our future, and who will perhaps use today's fantasies to create or discover newer, stranger truths than ever before.

Back to the mag, now—"No Head for My Bier"—I'm not sure, but it seemed to be funny. Nothing more.

"Lorelei Street", by Craig Browning, was a fine example of eery fantasy that held me to the last sentence. Good going, Craig.

"The Fifth Child" had all that, too, and more because of the sweet nostalgia for the lost past which can never really die. An old romantic like I am (I'm no teener—I'll be 36 next September) can really appreciate the pull of such a tender story. Also, secretly I relish the idea of a *man* being true to his young dream. I've always hoped one *could* be true, especially my own man!—and who am I to say they can't?

So your mag was fine throughout, with only minor slips, and if I had a cake, I'd send you a big chocolate one—6 layers!

Gwen Cunningham
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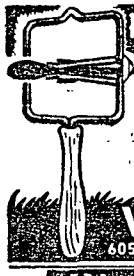

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are more important than dear old FA. The thought is positively revolting! Anyway, we'll bet you never pick as many winners at the track as you do in our pages..... Ed.

WELL WORTH THE PRICE

Dear Editor,

I was all right until I read "The Masters of Sleep" by L. Ron Hubbard in the October FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Then I developed a split personality. Guess I need a shot of dianetics in a glass of water!

I go for those sailing-ship stories, however—where the topsails flap around and men are men—no—that's where the West begins. How do they *do* it? I couldn't even steer a pushmobile around an A & P—on paper. Or could I? Danged if I don't try it. Wait. O.K. I am now up in the attic, gnawing on a crust of bread, my hair over my eyes and a sign "AUTHOR" pinned on my shirt. Well, let's see. How's this: "Captain Bailey gave the sailor a stern look and requested him to take the painter and paint the aft bridgehead blue. "'Step lively,'" he said, "'and do it in a semantical way.'"

Hmmm? Not too good, I guess.

Seriously, though, it *is* a thrilling adventure story—I guess a lot of dirty shenanigans *do* go on when those men in white come for you. (I don't mean you personally, Ed—it's just what us high-class authors call a "figure of speech".)

Now that I am an author myself, I am sorry for the mean things I said about authors in my previous letter. Incidentally, I found out that authors and other harmless wildlife are protected by the Game Commission from aprilhem and from mayhem. There's always the chance, too, that an author will reform and go earn an honest living by laying bricks (not on reader's heads) or maybe by selling lottery tickets or life insurance.

Well, commences now again. I hope not (I don't think I could *stand* it!). The tripe stories the Guvvmint will force you to print about the evil-leering Japaneze Sergeant-oops! I mean the evil-leering Korean (North) Sergeant who leers evilly at the invincible Yank G. I. science-fiction hero and his invincible pal and at the heroine (a babe with a shape, brother, and only a torn brassiere to her name). This Korean (North) leerer will find out what's what. He will wish he had stood in bed—him and his whole platoon—after the hero gets done throwing dimensions and time-tracks and H, I, and J2 bombs at him! If there is one thing I hate, it is an evil-leering Korean (North) Sergeant (on account of because of he ain't democratic). Stories like that again? Good gahd, *could* I stand it! Lend me an empty toothpaste tube to guhnash my teeth on.

Wait. Don't go away. I got a couple dirty cracks to make about the *cover*. What is this! FANTASTIC ADVEN-

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TURES turning respectable on us? No LHB (Luscious Half-naked Babe) on the cover? You wanna lose half the customers?—the lecherous half? And that guy on the cover with the hair in his ears—what is *he* for? To give us science-fiction fans nightmares? He looks like my Uncle Mortimer. Or maybe like some guy who might have been foreman in the factory of Borgia Perfumes and Preparations, Inc.

Some of the short stories had good ideas in them, this time. All in all, I guess we got our quarter's worth.

Ralph Bailey
354 West 56 Street
New York 19, New York

So far we don't have a single yarn in the house with a North Korean war background. So you can rest easy. But now that you've got us thinking about it...Ed.

FABLES FROM THE FUTURE

★ By LEE OWENS ★

PLUTONIAN PROOF

THE BELIEF has been steadily growing in the astronomical world that there is a trans-Plutonian planet. It has even been given a suggested name—*Loki*. No one has seen even a trace of it through the most powerful telescopes. There is not the slightest visual or physical evidence for its existence—but the chances are mighty good that it isn't a figment of somebody's imagination.

Hypothetical *Loki* has manifested itself in many more subtle ways, ways however, which are just as impressive as if the planet suddenly appeared in the sky.

More accurate observations of the planet Pluto itself have disclosed some discrepencies, and mathematical calculation has suggested an explanation. First of all, the diameter of Pluto has been modified in the most recent check-ups. It is not as big as Earth or Mars as was once thought. Instead it is somewhere between Mercury and Mars in size with a very probable diameter of about three thousand six hundred miles. This figure is accurate to within about five percent.

The reflectivity of its surface is about seventeen percent.

These two facts suggest that an average or common density must be expected which would put the mass of the planet at about one-tenth that of the Earth. This is a completely reasonable figure—but it introduces further complications. Assuming the mass to be about one-tenth that of Earth, means that nine-tenths of the perturbative effect of Pluto on Neptune is eliminated. In other words, Pluto effects the motion of Neptune by only one

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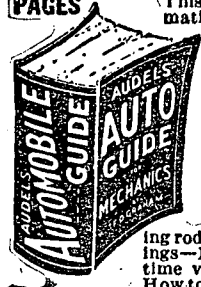

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tenth of the actual observed amount.

Evidently, assuming the facts on Pluto to be true—and the only questionable one is the matter of density—something else must account for the perturbations of the Neptunian orbit. Consequently the hypothesis of a trans-Plutonian body is likely to be accepted.

The only way the existence of *Loki*, the lonely body more than four billion miles from the Sun, can be determined is through actual observation. Therefore, dependent upon mathematical calculations to pin-point and locate the new planet, telescopic observation should eventually nail that body. Generally it is a matter of tediously photographing the suggested regions of space and then examining the photographs for lines where dots should be. The stars remain dots because the telescope rotates at their angular rate of speed. The planet does not. Consequently it will appear as a small line on the photograph. That's the way Pluto was trapped and that's the way we can expect *Loki* to be nabbed.

Yes, astronomy still has plenty of fascinating and absorbing detective work still linked with it. It's not all deep, abstruse theoretical work, suitable only for gray-bearded mathematicians!

★ ★ ★

HOPEFUL HELICOPTERS

THE AUTOMOBILE has just about reached its ultimate development. Naturally new motors etc. may modify it somewhat, but basically we know what a car can do and can't. The next important stage in personal transport is going to have to be in the air. After the failure of the highly-touted light aircraft boom, flying seems to have settled down. Private flying of airplanes of the conventional type we think, will be comparatively limited. But quietly, without a great deal of fanfare, helicopter development is going on apace.

The military and naval authorities are relegating more and more tasks to the flying propellor. Because it can hover, rise and descend vertically, the helicopter is potentially one of the most useful types of air vehicles for short and moderate distances. For long distances of course the plane, propellor, jet or rocket, can't be beat. The helicopter is being used in short-run mail services. It is being used as a high-speed ambulance. It is being used in certain commercial deliveries.

Behind its development are a host of quiet engineers who are determined to bring it more into the public domain. Like any flying machine, the helicopter is a lot more complicated than a car, but engineering is managing to do wonders in simplifying it. It is a certainty that the helicopter will be the air-vehicle of times to come. Up until now, controlling it has required considerable skill, but this complication has been overcome until now one

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is as easy to handle as a car.

If some large agency were to assign the money, effort and energy to helicopter research, there is no question but that the machine could be made commonplace. It is rather odd in a way that this hasn't been done. You don't have to be a genius to see how the machine adds the third dimension of the air to travel and makes going from one place to another simpler than we've ever dreamed of.

It's not easy to get an exact picture in your mind's eye of a future city—things change too fast—but one thing is clear, that picture is going to contain lots of "flying egg-beaters". They'll be as common a part of the scene as the automobile is today!

★ ★ ★

"QUICK AND DEAD..."

THE FACT that radioactive materials disintegrate with age at a rate proportional to the quantity present, is clearly described by the term "half-life". The most familiar radioactive substance, radium, has a "half-life" of about eighteen hundred years, which means that after eighteen years the quantity you started with will have decreased to one half. Start with a pound—eighteen hundred years later, you have but half a pound; eighteen hundred years after that you have a quarter of a pound and eighteen hundred years after *that* you have an eighth of a pound—and so on, *ad infinitum*.

The half-lives of radioactive materials and fundamental atomic particles vary widely. Recently scientists have summarized the two extremes which they have so far discovered to exist. An ordinary non-radioactive element of course endures forever, but excluding this possibility and confining their observations to radioactives which have extremely long half-lives, scientists have learned that the element with the longest half-life is Tellurium 130. At first it was believed that this was a normal non-radioactive element. Subsequent disclosures have revealed to the contrary. Tellurium 130 has a half-life of one and a half *sextillion* years! This is five hundred times the estimated age of the Earth! It is clear that of the Tellurium present in the Earth's mass only an insignificant quantity has had time to vanish into energy. The decay of Tellurium must occur at an incredibly slow rate with an atom "popping-off" every few thousand years. We can't imagine a slower natural process than this. At present the knowledge is of no practical use, but it certainly is impressive to think of a natural phenomenon occurring at such an insignificant rate.

On the other hand, the fastest sort of decay is that of the neutral meson, a subatomic particle which is at present the object of a tremendous amount of scientific research. The neutral meson which manifests itself in the form of two high-energy gamma rays (x-rays), has a half life of one *ten-trillionth* of a second!

Since the meson travels with the veloci-

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ty of light it is interesting to compare exactly how far it has gone in the time of its disintegration. It turns out that traveling at the speed of light, it traverses a distance of less than a thousandth of an inch before it vanishes into the gamma rays!

Actually more startling than the knowledge of these two extreme reactions is the knowledge of the fact that they can be measured at all. But it is surprising with what facility atomic reactions can be observed by means of film and Geiger-impossible to tell even of the existence of Mueller counter and Wilson Cloud Chamber. Without such instruments it would be such things as mesons and half-lives.

★ ★ ★

GOOD AND BAD S-F...

IN LETTER sections and in editorials the question of what constitutes a good science fiction story and the question of whether present authors are producing them, are hotly debated. If you have access to a large file of magazines both old and recent, you can easily make the test for yourself. And you'll discover a simple and obvious fact. If you'll look back on what you've read and enjoyed, allowing for momentary enthusiasms, you'll find that essentially a good science fiction story is no different than any other kind. This may sound like heresay, but it's true!

If the story concerns people, their problems, the resolution of those problems, and if the story is well-written, smooth and capable of sustaining interest, that story is good and you've enjoyed it. Glancing back over "the good old days" and studying the so-called "classics" clearly demonstrates this. As a general rule a new idea or new scientific concept around which a story is built, is not sufficient to make that story. There must be more to it than that.

Consequently when you hear some one raving about the magnificent stories published in the past, you'll generally find that at that time he'd just discovered the magic of science-fiction and that actually he is not thinking of a story but rather a gadget, a gimmick or an idea that intrigued him.

On the other hand look at a good deal of the s-f being written today. Since new scientific ideas are almost impossible to find, the author has had no choice but to really *write* a coherent related story, based on people, their motivations, desires problems etc. As a result we think it's safe to say that today you're not only getting science-fiction of the first caliber, you're getting *fiction*.

No, don't believe the tales of "good old days". They're just bleary nostalgic memories concocted by imagination. There were some good stories written. There were more bad ones. Nostalgia generally plays you false. Sit back and dig your eyes into some of the first class fiction being written today!

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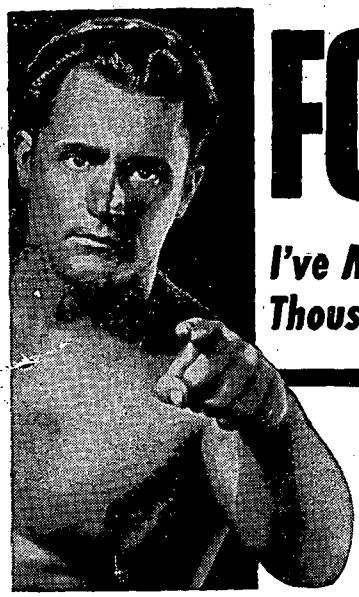

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